

The ALABAMA REVIEW

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VOLUME III 1950

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University of Alabama

Managing Editor: JAMES B. McMILLAN

University of Alabama

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Josiah Gorgas And The Brierfield Iron Works

By FRANK E. VANDIVER

As Brigadier General Josiah Gorgas made his way south from Virginia at the close of the Civil War, he realized it would not be easy to readjust himself to the comparative inactivity of private life.¹ A large portion of his personal fortune had been invested in Confederate securities, and, since these were now valueless, he had very little money with which to begin the process of starting over. While serving as Chief of Ordnance of the Confederate Army he had been unable, perhaps unwilling, to decide what course he would follow if the South were defeated. But after April 2, 1865, and the abandonment of Richmond, he had been forced to face the issue. For a man of forty-six he saw a bleak future.

His wife, Amelia Gayle Gorgas, daughter of a former Governor of Alabama, and their six children had been trapped in the tottering capital of the Confederacy, but Gorgas had escaped with Thomas L. Bayne, his brother-in-law and fellow officer, and made his way to Danville, Virginia. Here, along with Jefferson Davis and some of the members of his Cabinet, the two men awaited news of General Lee, who, they knew, was trying to join forces with General Joseph E. Johnston in North Carolina. When, on April 10 the news came that Lee had surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia, Gorgas and his companion began their long and hazardous trek to Alabama. Equipped with a wagon and some Confederate money, they made their way toward Charlotte, which they reached shortly before it fell to the advancing Federals. Gorgas's point of destination was Greensboro, Alabama, and that of Bayne was Selma, some fifty miles nearer.

Long before the two reached Montgomery, May 26, the ravaged, chaotic condition of Alabama had become obvious. There was ex-

¹ This paper has resulted from research made possible by a grant-in-aid from the Rockefeller Foundation.

tremely little food in the country, and only in cities where the Freedmen's Bureau and Federal troops were located did the people appear to eat with any regularity. Gorgas was worried about the possibility of being arrested, but an old friend of his from pre-war service in the U. S. Army, General A. J. Smith, told him in Montgomery that there were no orders to arrest Confederate officers. Unmolested, Gorgas and Bayne continued their journey by river steamer to Selma. Bayne disembarked at that place and Gorgas continued on alone, finally reaching his destination on May 29, 1865.²

For some time after Gorgas arrived in Greensboro he could not fully grasp the disaster that had befallen the Confederate States. While he allowed himself time to readjust gradually to the new conditions existing, making no serious efforts to explore the possibilities of obtaining a job, he observed the pathetic conditions about him. Alabama, as well as most of the other former Confederate States, had sustained almost incredible material losses and the standard of living had sagged alarmingly. Everywhere was first-hand evidence of the economic paralysis of his adopted state. Property losses were estimated to have amounted to \$500,000,000, including the value of the slaves. Widespread confiscation of livestock by both contending armies had reduced the number of animals far below that of the prosperous pre-war days. The total value of farm property, which in 1860 had amounted to over \$250,000,000, was now estimated at only \$97,716,055. Damage had proved so thorough in the farming areas of the state that by the turn of the century agricultural standards had not yet re-attained the level of 1860. All banking capital, of course, was worth nothing, and assets of the state had greatly depreciated.³ The transportation network of the state was bankrupt. Alabama had boasted some 800 miles of track in 1860, and during the war little or no additions were made. The continual use of rolling stock in the face of governmental inability or refusal to repair it had brought ruin to the roads. At the close of the fighting the Tennessee & Alabama Railroad had no more than

² Diary of Josiah Gorgas (May 29, 1865). Hereinafter cited as Diary. This manuscript and others cited (unless otherwise stated) are in possession of General Gorgas's daughters, Gorgas Home, University of Alabama. The writer is deeply grateful to Mrs. George Palfrey and Miss Maria Bayne Gorgas, daughters of the General, for their unfailing cooperation and assistance.

³ Walter L. Fleming, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama* (New York, 1905), p. 254.

three serviceable cars. Rails were unsafe, locomotives out of order and depots, bridges and trestles destroyed. The Mobile & Ohio had lost \$5,228,562.23 in Confederate currency; 37 miles of track were worn out, 21 miles had been burned, and 184 miles were devoid of bridges, trestles and stations. In addition, the Federal Army had destroyed shops and other repairing facilities. The Alabama & Tennessee Rivers Railroad alone had lost at least a million dollars in Confederate money, "its shops, tools, and machinery at Selma, 6 bridges, its trestle, some track and many depots, its locomotives and cars."⁴

Perhaps the general apathy of the people of the South immediately following the Civil War may be partially attributed to this economic stagnation in the wake of widespread destruction. But to a man in Gorgas's position lethargy was an ill-afforded luxury. His family had by now moved to Maryland and they looked to him for money. Good fortune he had in obtaining a small sum from cotton rescued from the war, and some funds came to him as a result of a blockade running enterprise, but his stock of capital was quite limited. He needed a means of permanent support, and he needed it quickly.

There were some possibilities: the Red Mountain Iron Company, not far from Elyton, Alabama (now Birmingham), appeared to offer an opportunity in a business with which he was moderately familiar. Then, too, several railroad companies, in need of an executive officer, also were to be considered.⁵ Gorgas wrote to Robert Jemison, Jr., a former Confederate senator and would-be industrialist, concerning the possibility of resuming work on the North East & South West Railroad (which might serve Elyton), confiding in Jemison that he thought seriously of "applying myself to the development of the mineral resources of the region of country which that road will penetrate. . . . One can hardly go wrong in that region so fertile in the elements of future wealth. The mining interest and the Rail Road interest must go hand in hand—that latter must lead the former & must then be sustained by it—"⁶ Jemison seemed a likely person to write to about this problem, since he belonged to that class of men whom Gorgas recognized as anxious to forget the war as

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 259-60.

⁵ Diary, June 12, 16, 19, 1865.

⁶ Letter, Gorgas to Robert Jemison, Jr., Greensboro, Ala., n. d. (in Robert Jemison Collection, University of Alabama Library).

soon as possible and return to their former business pursuits.⁷ But in this case Jamison could offer the ex-General nothing.

Gorgas did not by any means abandon hope. On July 1, 1865, he wrote in his journal: "I am now at the age of 47, beginning life anew so far as my provision for my family is concerned. If the country were in a prosperous or even settled condition, it would be easy enough to earn one's bread and something more, but prospects are gloomy enough and it may be some time before I get at settled work."⁸

The necessity of earning a decent living had evidently caused a significant change in Gorgas's personal attitude toward Andrew Johnson's Proclamation of Amnesty. Bitter at the thought of taking an amnesty oath when he first heard about them, Gorgas had so modified his views by August, 1865, that he wrote his wife on the twenty-first: "I have not yet taken the oath of amnesty, tho' I am entirely ready to do so, whenever I get a good chance." True, he sought reasons why it would be unnecessary for him to take the oath: "I don't want to vote and have no property which is confiscable . . . no object in being in a hurry"—but this admission was a large concession to existing conditions.⁹ He had decided to make the best of a bad situation.

By August, 1865, another idea had crystallized in his mind. Although he heard that he could have obtained the superintendency of the Selma & Meridian Railroad, and although he really thought that this would be a better job, he had made up his mind to try the iron business. The rationalization he used in arriving at this decision had the advantage of being the truth. He told Amelia, his wife, that all of his training fitted him much more adequately for that sort of work than for the management of a railroad. It was also a "business which I have more *heart* for than any other I have tho't of." There was one drawback: Amelia hated just the sort of isolated existence which the administration of an iron factory would necessitate. But Gorgas had decided, and he maintained that the thing to do was to make the best of the isolation.¹⁰

⁷ See letter, Gorgas to Amelia Gorgas, [Greensboro, Ala.], July 1, 1865.

⁸ Diary, July 1, 1865.

⁹ Letter, Gorgas to Amelia Gorgas, Greensboro, Ala., August 21, 1865. Gorgas took the oath of amnesty on August 22 (see Diary, entry of that day).

¹⁰ Letter, Gorgas to Amelia Gorgas, Greensboro, Ala., August 21, 1865.

Now that the problem of what he would do had been practically settled, the remaining questions were where to find suitable iron works and the money necessary to buy the plant. He believed that he could obtain the presidency of the Shelby Iron Company, near Columbiana, Alabama, without too much trouble. These works were well known to him, since they had supplied much vital iron to the Confederate Ordnance Bureau during the war, and this enterprise seemed to be ideally suited to him.¹¹ Though bitterly lonely and longing to go to Cambridge, Maryland, to see his family, he persevered in trying to find a permanent home for them in Alabama. Throughout the month of September and early October, 1865, therefore, he tried to work out an arrangement with Shelby which would give him gainful employment. But the Company, badly in need of money, could offer little encouragement.¹²

After trying for several weeks to locate some fairly promising sites for an iron establishment, Gorgas's attention was called to the furnace and plant at Brierfield, near Ashby, Alabama. This Company had been established in 1860 under the management of Caswell C. Huckabee and Jonathan N. Smith, who had sold out to the Confederate government during the war. Consequently the plant now belonged to the Federal government as the successor to the defunct Confederacy. It would require government permission to buy the Company, and Gorgas felt he would have to go to Washington to secure this permission. Here, too, he was probably rationalizing, since he was on personally friendly terms with General Wager Swayne, Assistant Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau in Alabama, who easily could have obtained the property for him. But a trip to Washington for the ostensible purpose of purchasing land would also offer an opportunity to see the family in Maryland. His departure for the North hinged on the uncertainty of obtaining special authority to make such a trip.

A request for aid from his brother-in-law, Thomas L. Bayne, who now lived in New Orleans, brought prompt response in the form of approval by General Philip Sheridan.¹³ Consequently, armed with

¹¹ *Ibid.*, September 11-12, 1865. See also Frank E. Vandiver, "The Shelby Iron Company in the Civil War: A Study of a Confederate Industry," *The Alabama Review*, I (January, April, July, 1948).

¹² Diary, October 14, 1865.

¹³ Letters, Gorgas to Amelia Gorgas, Greensboro. Ala., August 14. September 29, 1865. Sheridan's approval was further strengthened during a trip to New Orleans

official permission, he started for Maryland on October 26 or 27 and arrived there on November 2, 1865.¹⁴

On November 11, after spending about a week with his family on Chesapeake Bay, Gorgas went to Washington to inquire at the Treasury Department about the possibility of purchasing the Brierfield plant. He hoped to form a company to help him finance it, and was anxious to have something definite to tell prospective stockholders. After a delay of several weeks, he obtained a letter from General O. O. Howard to General Swayne, authorizing the sale of the property, if it was not needed for the Freedmen's Bureau.¹⁵ Elated, Gorgas returned to Alabama and set about finding money. His efforts were successful. Francis Lyon, a former Confederate congressman and close personal friend of Gorgas, brought several others into the project with him, and soon the Company boasted some eleven stockholders, commanding a combined capital of \$95,000, with \$5,000 in reserve.¹⁶ General Swayne consented to the disposal of the property as authorized by General Howard, and the "Canebrake Company" purchased the plant at auction in January, 1866, for \$45,000.¹⁷

The iron Works, as they had existed during the war, had not been operated on an imposing scale, nor was the physical plant large or especially well developed. But the Federal army, during the great cavalry raids directed against Alabama's iron regions, had not spared Brierfield, and the damage was considerable. Gorgas observed, however, that a good train connected the mills and the furnaces and that two serviceable stacks, with one arranged for hot blast, were there, in addition to 4,000 acres of land.¹⁸ The iron ore was scattered, but

in late September, when Gorgas and Bayne both visited General E. R. S. Canby, Federal department commander. He told Gorgas, whom he had known when they were both still in the "old army," that he did not foresee any trouble arising over Gorgas' trip to Maryland. By the middle of October Gorgas had abandoned hope of obtaining title to the Brierfield property without a trip to Washington. ¹⁴ Diary, October 15, 21, November 4, 1865. The equivocation about the date of departure is Gorgas' own.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, December 17, 1865.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, January 20, 1866.

¹⁷ Ethel M. Armes, *The Story of Coal and Iron in Alabama* (Birmingham, Alabama, 1910), p. 204. The Alabama legislature incorporated the company on January 28, 1867 (see "An Act To incorporate the Brierfield Iron Works Company of the county of Bibb," in *Acts of the Session of 1866-7 of the General Assembly of Alabama . . .*, Montgomery, 1867, pp. 229-230).

¹⁸ Diary, October 15, 1865.

sufficient, and he had no real doubt about the future success of his enterprise. Gorgas, who was to act as manager of the Works for the Company, planned to utilize \$30,000 of the remaining capital of the stockholders to repair the plant and put in new machinery. This would leave \$25,000 with which to begin operations. The Company had no fears about being able to increase the number of stockholders, and looked forward to larger capitalization.¹⁹

The outstanding objection to Brierfield, as far as the Gorgases were concerned, was the primitive surroundings and the isolation. Although Amelia and the children had been exposed to living of this kind when Gorgas was in the United States Ordnance Department, they had grown to dislike it intensely. Gorgas did not wish to impose it upon his family, but there was nothing else he could do. As it turned out, the family discovered certain compensations, when they began to consider Brierfield carefully. Many of Gorgas's Confederate cronies were living fairly close at hand, and General William J. Hardee, whose plantation was within a day's trip, was a frequent visitor to the Works.²⁰ Then, too, the people who lived in the vicinity established a neighborliness which it would have been impossible to achieve in a city. "Storms," as some parties were called, were organized and eagerly attended. Society, while lacking much in fashion, lacked little in energy and enthusiasm. The Gorgases were somewhat better off than others might have been in similar circumstances, since there were many family connections and old friends throughout Alabama.

Gorgas had made plans to receive his family in January, 1866, but delays in arranging a place for them to stay had made it impractical to have them come down from Maryland until April. By then he had succeeded in having a house made ready for their occupancy and had made some arrangements for civilized living. Amelia and the children reached Brierfield on April 12, and moved into the home that all of them hoped might be permanent.

The house itself was not pretentious, since pretention had given way to necessity in the South of that era. It needed paint and was situated distressingly close to the railroad, but it had several advantages. It had been built atop a small rise in the hilly ground near

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, January 20, 1866.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, July 12, 1865; Gorgas to Amelia Gorgas, Greensboro, Ala., August 21, 1865.

the rolling mill and on one side the lawn sloped gently down toward a small creek that gave Gorgas's garden added lushness. The house had been located high enough to catch whatever breeze might blow during the hot summer days, and the general effect was that of easy-going comfort.²¹

Gorgas had effected a workable compromise with his family, and had gained their acquiescence to the country life by promising that during the winter months the family might visit New Orleans. Amelia could take comfort, too, from the guests that frequented her house, including such notables as Generals William J. Hardee and Joseph E. Johnston.²² Railroad connection with Selma provided mail service for the family and brought them newspapers which prevented their complete stagnation.²³ Food came by the same medium. On the whole, Brierfield was a fairly pleasant place to live.

As the days went by, Gorgas's outlook became progressively darker, not because of living conditions, but because of the troubles he continually encountered in getting and keeping the Works in operation. His own bitterness and growing disillusionment added to the problems of the family. His depression, partly a carry-over from the last hectic months of the War, was heightened by the election of Alabama's Reconstruction Convention. "What an end to our great hopes!" he wrote in his diary. "Is it possible that we were wrong? Is it possible after all that one set of men can force their opinions on another set? It seems so, and that self government is a mockery before the Almighty. . . . Let us bow in submission and learn to curb our bitter thoughts."²⁴ Since the failure of the Confederacy, he confessed, his life had been "bitter and barren."²⁵ As a matter of fact, his despondency grew so marked that the material needs of his family on several occasions were the only things that carried him through, though a continuing interest in current events helped considerably.²⁶

²¹ This description is partly based on observation of the site of the Gorgas house.

²² Letter, Johnston to Gorgas, Selma, Ala., January 19, 1867; Diary, January 7, 1867. It is interesting to note that among the cherished relics of the Gorgas family is a bed 7½ feet long, affectionately called "the Hardee bed," which Gorgas had built especially to accommodate the long frame of his friend.

²³ Letter, Gorgas to Col. J. L. White, Brierfield, Ala., January 23, 1867 (in Letter Book, 61, Brierfield Iron Works Collection, University of Alabama Library).

²⁴ Diary, August 3, 1865.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, July 1, 1866.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, August 6, 21, September 16, 1866.

There appeared in his depression an essentially new facet, one that seemed so unlike him as to indicate the possible existence of illness. He became frightened at the thought of the responsibility that management of the Company entailed and confessed that "I am in constant terror lest our funds may fail before I can get any returns from them. The load of responsibility is even greater than that of Chief of Ordnance in the Confederacy."²⁷ He could not throw off the dread of failure at Brierfield, and this possibility preyed constantly on his mind.²⁸ His anxiety grew so acute that he recognized its abnormality, and sought to attribute it to dyspepsia or to some other organic ill.²⁹ The lowest point in his outlook came in January, 1867, when he wrote in his journal: "For no imaginable recompense would I live this life over again. I can now see how these poor doomed, destroyed wretches whose life destruction we daily see chronicled, are forced to their doom. Nothing is so terrible as despair."³⁰ By April, 1867, something of his old determination had returned, however, and although reasonably convinced that the Works would fail, he vowed his intention to "persevere to the last."³¹ Certainty of failure came fully upon him in June and made the Fourth of July hardly a day for celebration. The political sham of the Carpetbag régime, although not actually in full swing as yet, doubtless contributed to his feeling of disgust and he had almost reached the point of being ready again to take up arms against the Union had it all not seemed so futile. In September, after alternate hope and gloom, Gorgas received the news that President Johnson's latest Amnesty Proclamation included everyone except Jefferson Davis and members of the Confederate Cabinet, governors of states and officers above the rank of brigadier general. This news meant little to him, and he did not look with pleasure upon the necessity of taking the oath of allegiance.³² Christmas of 1867 did not pass happily at the Gorgas home, and Amelia observed that "our misfortunes seem to come towards Christmas . . . it is never a season of rejoicing with us." The children, fortunately, were more than content with the little gifts that could be given them, and seemed oblivious to the

²⁷ *Ibid.*, September 16, 1866.

²⁸ See *ibid.*, September 30, 1866, for typical entry.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, October 15, 1866.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, January 7, 1867.

³¹ *Ibid.*, April 3, 1867.

³² *Ibid.*, September 15, 1867.

fact that their father was so downcast that he took a long, lonesome walk by himself.³³

In January, 1866, when Gorgas had begun his work at the Brierfield Iron Works, he had planned to build the firm up along the same lines he had used in building up the Confederate Ordnance Bureau. First, he wanted able men as his subordinates, and it was natural that he should seek the services of those who had served him well during the war. As his first assistant he employed W. H. McMain, who had been in charge of the Dalton Ordnance Depot, and later, as chemist, his friend, John William Mallet, who was also a stockholder. Mallet had been Superintendent of Confederate Ordnance Laboratories.³⁴

From the outset Gorgas realized that the task of getting the plant into operation was not to be as easy as he had hoped. Expenses were overwhelming—over \$200 per day for labor alone—and the purchases of material, machinery and food continued heavy. He estimated that it required fully \$10,000 per month to cover the plant's outlay. The only salvation that he could imagine in July, 1866, was to get the furnace in blast by August,³⁵ and at best this was an uncertain prospect. The labor supply was an indeterminate factor. Negroes proved particularly unreliable, and those who did work well were not entirely satisfactory, chiefly because of the activities of the Ku Klux Klan, which, on at least two occasions, frightened them away from their work.³⁶ In addition, the Freedmen's Bureau did not function with efficiency in that section of Alabama and this left Brierfield at times in possession of "workers" who would not work.³⁷ As early as March, 1867, the lack of money had forced Gorgas to refuse to hire additional labor. Even his skilled workers could not be increased, nor could those he already had be relied upon to any

³³ *Ibid.*, December 14, 25, 1867.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, May 3, July 1, 1866.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, July 1, 1866.

³⁶ Gorgas to Francis S. Lyon, February 22, 1867, Letter Book, 104.

³⁷ Gorgas to Lt. George Shakley, April 1, 1867, *ibid.*, 152. In this letter to an officer of the Freedmen's Bureau, Gorgas wrote, "An aged Freedman named *Brutus* is here in a very destitute & helpless condition. He was brought here from Georgia during the war & can look to no one here for care in his old age. This company has supplied him with food & shelter for a year past for which he has been unable to render much return. It is a case you will find calling for immediate relief & I beg your *earliest* attention to it."

great extent.³⁸ All things considered, the labor supply was almost a liability.

Another major problem in the initial operation of the plant was the purchase of needed equipment. One example will suffice to show the sort of trouble encountered in securing machinery for the rolling mill. On September 11, 1866, Gorgas ordered some small rolls from a manufacturer in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. They failed to arrive for several weeks and Gorgas wrote several letters to the factory between November 16, 1866, and February 8, 1867. Finally, he learned that shipment had been delayed by ice and that the rolls would ultimately arrive. But in the interim he had been forced to put off prospective orders for rolled iron and for hoops and iron ties, much to the detriment of the Company's trade.³⁹

Underlying all the other problems of the management of the Works was that of money, just as it had been with Gorgas in the management of the Confederate Ordnance Bureau. Banks in the South had been wiped out because of the worthlessness of Confederate currency, and by 1867 they had not been able to recuperate. Of course, Gorgas had begun his work with the confident hope that the Company would make money. But in this he was sorely mistaken—by later 1866 he had to scrimp even to secure enough cash to buy corn. He requested some of the Company creditors to extend their loans or bills, and urged upon the stockholders the necessity of a loan of \$25,000.⁴⁰ As president of the Company, a position the stockholders voted upon him in February, 1867, Gorgas had more authority to make financial arrangements than before. He left no stone unturned.

Among the attempts he made were liens against future production of the Works, sightdrafts, and sales of the Company's foodstocks. As credit became tighter (it finally became impossible to deal in credit at Selma), Gorgas grew almost desperate. "We are heavily in debt and with the present condition of our country—the South—it is impossible to sell stock or to borrow money," he wrote Colonel J. L. White. In view of these conditions he feared that Brierfield

³⁸ Gorgas to William T. Quimby, March 3, 1867, *ibid.*, 121; Gorgas to Fowler, Hessee & Co. (Mobile), June 18, 1867, *ibid.*, 268.

³⁹ Gorgas to Messrs. A. Garrison & Co. (Pittsburg, Pa.), November 16, 30, December 5, 1866, February 7, 1867, *ibid.*, 3, 12, 22, 84.

⁴⁰ Gorgas to Col. J. L. White, December 16, 26, 1866, *ibid.*, 27-28, 36; Gorgas to Dr. J. W. Watkins, January 1, 1867, *ibid.*, 39; Gorgas to D. F. Prout, January 23, 1867, *ibid.*, 62-63.

might be forced to sacrifice its property. "We could make money and work ourselves out of debt could we but find a market for our products at any rate which we had a right to calculate on."⁴¹

As the financial condition grew worse, Gorgas resorted to frantic measures to keep it going. On June 20, 1867, he mortgaged the Iron Works to his wife for the sum of \$5,224.74, and on October 1, he borrowed from her the amount of \$1,354.⁴² Decreasing returns from sales of its products and the stringency of the currency forced the Company into a practice of barter, not unlike that practiced in war days, which it should have avoided if at all possible. The large quantities of food needed at the Works cost more than the receipts would cover, and Gorgas sought to exchange iron for food. He tried the same scheme to obtain coke and other supplies.⁴³

The sale of iron, which should have been the source of greatest revenue, did not pay anything like the expected profits. The reasons were several. Cost of production of foundry pig iron ran more than \$32 per short ton. The Company made other, "fancier," types of iron and sold its best charcoal iron for \$60 to \$70 per short ton. New York offered a better, more lucrative market than the South, but Gorgas recognized several drawbacks to making New York profitable as an outlet. These included charges for drayage, breakage and weighing, plus the cost of transfer from railroad to steamboat at Selma, Alabama.⁴⁴ On the other hand, prices for iron in nearby markets, such as Mobile, scarcely paid the cost of production. A firm in Mobile sold some Brierfield iron for \$43 per ton. Better prices could have been obtained, except for competition from Selma, where an individual offered "number one" iron for \$35 and "number two" for \$34 per ton. In view of this, Gorgas thought it might be well to raise the price of his product in the local market. The low prices brought by all types of iron in the South had pushed Brierfield's

⁴¹ See Gorgas to White, May 16, 1867, *ibid.*, 202; Gorgas to Guyol, Gayle & Co. (New Orleans), June 11, 1867, *ibid.*, 251; Gorgas to Col. James Crawford, June 17, 1867, *ibid.*, 264; Diary, June 30, 1867.

⁴² See mortgage, June 20, 1867, and note, signed by Gorgas as president of the Brierfield Works, October 1, 1867 (in Gorgas Home).

⁴³ Gorgas to J. E. Prestridge, November 15, 1866, Letter Book, 1; Gorgas to L. F. Mellen, February 7, 1867, *ibid.*, 83-84; Gorgas to Messrs. G. & C. Place, February 12, 1867, *ibid.*, 88; Gorgas to Harville Steren, Superintendent, Central Mining and Manufacturing Company of Alabama (Montevallo), February 18, 1867, *ibid.*, 95.

⁴⁴ Gorgas to Messrs. J. C. Graham & Co. (Selma), December 3, 1866, *ibid.*, 15; Gorgas to Z. C. Deas, December 4, 1866, April 13, 1867, *ibid.*, 21, 156-157.

down so low that the Company was probably taking a loss in much of its production. In one letter, dated May 9, 1867, Gorgas stated that he would deliver pig iron "on the cars" at Brierfield for \$32 per short ton, while in another letter, dated June 15, he said that production costs were more than \$32.50 per ton.⁴⁵

Another factor in the decreasing returns on production was an error in management, almost as costly as operating expenses. In the frenzy attending the efforts to sell iron, the Company made a tactical blunder in permitting too many concerns to market its products, both in the North and South. This mistake was made worse because of the practice of carrying the price according to the wishes of the agencies. By April, 1867, Gorgas, in a letter to General Zachariah Deas, his New York agent, admitted this error and confessed that "it is undoubtedly unfortunate that all of our iron was not placed with you or some other one party but as we had to sell *here* we could not control it."⁴⁶

The ultimate result of this policy, of course, was that the company, through its selling agents, competed with itself for a market, in addition to competing with the other iron manufacturers. As each of the many official outlets for Brierfield iron put their stock on the market, the prices came down in proportion, and some of the northern agents advised Gorgas "how much our iron has suffered by being forced on the market thro' various hands."⁴⁷ This practice created a "bull market" condition, which the Company could ill afford, and badly affected future production.

Most of the raw materials for iron production were secured from the near vicinity of Brierfield. Coal and coke came from the Cahaba Coal Mines, with offices in Selma, and most of the ore came from

⁴⁵ Gorgas to J. M. Parkman, April 1, 1867, *ibid.*, 171-172; W. H. McMain to Messrs. Gilkerson & Sloss (St. Louis), May 9, 1867, *ibid.*, 189; Gorgas to Deas, June 15, 1867, *ibid.*, 261-262. On February 1, 1867, Gorgas had quoted the price of \$35 per short ton in Selma, and added that "these prices are much too low & must soon go up we think" (Gorgas to B. H. Micou, February 21, 1867, *ibid.*, 103-104).

⁴⁶ Gorgas to Deas, April 13, 1867, *ibid.*, 156-157; Gorgas to J. C. Graham & Co., December 3, 1866, *ibid.*, 15; Gorgas to N. M. Robinson, January 15, 1867, *ibid.*, 50; Gorgas to Messrs. Ware & Davis (Montgomery), February 12, 1867, *ibid.*, 88; Gorgas to D. F. Prout, April 9, 1867, *ibid.*, 160; Gorgas to J. M. Parkman, April 16, 1867, *ibid.*, 171-172; W. H. McMain to Messrs. Gilkerson & Sloss, May 9, 1867, *ibid.*, 189; Gorgas to Charles M. Williams, May 31, 1867, *ibid.*, 230-231.

⁴⁷ Gorgas to Deas, June 15, 1867, *ibid.*, 261-262.

Brierfield's own fields.⁴⁸ But the transportation of the raw materials posed a problem intimately connected with the reasons for the failure of the Brierfield Iron Company.

If money was the prime factor in keeping the plant running, Gorgas discovered that troubles over railroad transportation formed the greatest reasons for the gradual collapse of the company's venture. High freight rates on the Alabama & Tennessee Rivers Railroad made the shipping of iron to Selma ruinously expensive, since the price stood at \$3.25 per short ton in November, 1866, and was raised to \$3.92 by January, 1867.⁴⁹ Gorgas complained strenuously about these rates to officials of the road, but got only unsatisfactory responses. He carried his campaign to his friend, General William J. Hardee, president of the Selma & Mobile: "The rates over your road are sufficiently moderate & if we can get the same rates over this road, we may be able to compete in the market of St. Louis, as our iron is of such a nature as to command an advanced price. . . . Perhaps you can assist me in this matter."⁵⁰

These gestures resulted only in higher rates. While, in 1866, the freight charge per mile had amounted to 6½¢, the rate climbed steadily, until, in June, 1867, Gorgas had to pay 12¢ per ton per mile for wrought iron to Selma. By that time he had become convinced that the railroad did not want to aid the Works—"I fear it is not the design of this company to accomodate us"—and he did not like the necessity of having to beg for a reduction to 6½¢ again. But without a return to something like that rate, "it seems impossible to struggle on against such very high freight."⁵¹

The railroad proved uncoöperative in many ways other than high costs. The Iron Works depended on the line for the importation of coal and coke from the Cahaba company, and if the service did not remain efficient, the daily production of iron would suffer accordingly. The railroad apparently made no consistent effort to see that

⁴⁸ Gorgas to L. F. Mellen, January 4, 1867, *ibid.*, 41; Gorgas to Col. R. M. Moore, January 18, 1867, *ibid.*, 53-54; Gorgas to Moore, February 19, April 12, 1867, *ibid.*, 99, 166-167.

⁴⁹ Gorgas to Gen. W. J. Hardee, November 23, 1866, *ibid.*, 6; Gorgas to E. G. Barney, Superintendent, Alabama & Tennessee Rivers Railroad, November 23, 1866, *ibid.*, 7-8; Gorgas to Messrs. A. J. Moses & Co. (Mobile), January 5, 1867, *ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁰ Gorgas to Hardee, November 23, 1866, *ibid.*, 6.

⁵¹ Gorgas to E. G. Barney, November 23, 1866, *ibid.*, 7-8; Gorgas to White, June 25, 1867, *ibid.*, 242; Gorgas to Barney, June 25, 1867, *ibid.*, 280-281.

freight trains stopped to pick up cars loaded with iron at Brierfield. This resulted in several cars waiting several days for movement to Selma. Then, too, the road made no great effort to move coal from the Cahaba and Montevallo mines to Brierfield in adequate quantity and on time. This resulted in the partial suspension of activity in April, 1867.⁵²

In other ways the railroad managed to hamper Gorgas's operations with almost as much effect as deliberate failure to accept freight. Maintenance of track and switch connections, a vital function of the road, was never looked after adequately, and damaged side tracks in the Brierfield yards frequently held up shipments. The poor condition of the switch, connecting these yards with the main line of Alabama & Tennessee Rivers track, had the same effect. In addition, the railroad overlooked numerous little courtesies which would have improved the working chances of the Iron Works. No freight agent was designated for Brierfield and consequently no one could sign for freight. Brierfield was not made an approved stopping point, but was kept on the list of flag stations. Mail, addressed to the plant, was frequently put off the trains at Ashby Station, some distance from the Works. While these little irritations were not disastrous in themselves, they were the added straws that finally broke the back of the Company.⁵³

There were other adverse factors hampering Gorgas's endeavors. He complained in March, 1867, to tax collector William Berney, that it seemed wrong that the Company should be taxed for castings "made for our own works & used in putting up the machinery for making the products covered by our license. I cannot think this correct. . . . We are taxed for example for castings used in building our blast furnace the products of which *namely*; pig iron are exempt from taxation."⁵⁴

It would be unfair, however, to give the impression that Gorgas and his assistants failed to make any progress whatever in the face

⁵² Gorgas to Cahaba (Alabama) Coal Company, June 9, 1867, *ibid.*, 48; Gorgas to M. Stanton, January 8, 9, April 10, 1867, *ibid.*, 45, 46, 165; Gorgas to Mellen, January 7, 1867, *ibid.*, 43; Gorgas to C. B. Barnes, April 9, 1867, *ibid.*, 164; W. H. McMain to C. B. Andrews, May 4, 1867, *ibid.*, 187.

⁵³ Gorgas to Stanton, January 5, March 12, April 1, 1867, *ibid.*, 41-42, 135, 150-151; Gorgas to C. B. Andrews, April 12, 1867, *ibid.*, 151; Gorgas to E. G. Barney, June 25, 1867, *ibid.*, 280-281.

⁵⁴ Gorgas to Collector William Berney (Selma), March 15, 1867, *ibid.*, 139.

of these obstacles. On the contrary, they did very well with the Brierfield project for a time, and were particularly successful in perfecting the physical condition of the Works to produce iron. An officer of the United States Army Engineer Corps, in writing about the condition of these works in 1868, described them as follows:

All of the structures are of the most substantial kind. First, within one hundred yards of the railroad is the large rolling mill; within this there are three engines at work, one driving the 'muck train,' and intended also to drive the 'nail plate train,' a second which makes bar iron, and a third which pumps water, cuts off iron, and a machine for making buckles for cotton ties. Here are eight puddling furnaces, two heating furnaces, and four boilers supplying steam to the engines. The boilers are placed by the heating furnace, and the steam is made by the waste heat from those furnaces. The machinery all appears to work well, is placed on stone foundation, and is well disposed for work. The puddling furnaces will convert sixteen gross tons of pig iron into muck bar in twenty-four hours, and these are daily converted into twenty thousand pounds of bar iron, and one hundred kegs of cut nails—the machinery for which is all on the spot, though not yet put up.

The engineer then described the cupola crane, machine shop, pattern shop, small brass factory, blacksmith shop, school and the building intended for the nailery, all of which he considered to be of the first order. He described the hot blast furnace and the ore beds feeding the Works in complimentary terms and thought that the plant showed great promise—and this was as late as 1868.⁵⁵

In spite of the progress made, however, the passage of time pointed clearly to the fact that Brierfield would probably fail. The periodic stoppage of work at the furnaces for a variety of reasons was as clear an indication of this eventuality as could be desired.⁵⁶ Gorgas managed, somehow, to keep the plant in sporadic operation throughout 1867, but by June, 1868, he had become so convinced that it would be fruitless to hang on at Brierfield that he began to think of other employment. His idea about the futility of staying was shared by Colonel Mallet, who himself quit the Works on August 31, 1868, and went to the University of Virginia to teach.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Quoted in *Armes op. cit.*, pp. 204-207.

⁵⁶ These factors included bad weather, needed repairs, lack of an adequate market, and breakdowns. See for example, Gorgas to J. C. Graham & Co., March 1, May 31, 1867, Letter Book, 142, 229-230; Gorgas to Messrs. Prestridge & Knox (Selma), April 10, 1867, *ibid.*, 166; Gorgas to Guyol, Gayle & Co., May 28, 1867, *ibid.*, 225.

⁵⁷ Diary, August 31, 1868.

By mid-July, 1868, Gorgas heard about a movement afoot to get him appointed to the University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee. This institution needed a headmaster for its Junior Department, and seemed to offer a fine opportunity to indulge the propensities for teaching which Gorgas had always felt. After several trips to Sewanee, he secured the position and made definite plans to move there as soon as possible.

Since his appointment was not to become effective until 1869,⁵⁸ he had time to arrange for the transfer of Brierfield to other hands. He did not succeed for a year, however, when he finally leased the Works to Captain Thomas S. Alvis, who had been familiar with them during the war.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, he had been forced to dismantle the furnace and install a new hearth. By July, 1869, the supply of ore had run out entirely, putting the final touch to Gorgas's ill-fated administration of the Brierfield Iron Works Company.

He moved to Sewanee July 1, 1869, to accept his new position,⁶⁰ a place he was destined to hold for eight years. Behind him he left a reminder of dual tragedy: the economic prostration of the South in the late 1860's and that of his own personal failure as a businessman.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, June 7, July 10, August 9, September 23, 1868.

⁵⁹ Articles of Agreement, signed by Gorgas and Thomas S. Alvis, August 2, 1869 (mss. in Fitch Papers, University of Alabama Library). Gorgas attained the position of Vice-Chancellor of the University of the South before his resignation.

⁶⁰ Diary, November 5, 1868.

An Alabama Confederate Soldier's Report To His Wife

By ROBERT PARTIN

HIRAM TALBERT HOLT, the writer of almost all of the Holt Papers, was born July 16, 1835, at Choctaw Corner, eight miles from Thomasville, Clarke County, Alabama.¹ On September 1, 1859, he married Angeline Caroline DeWitt, the "Dear Carrie" of the letters. Before the Civil War he was a school teacher and operator of a "little farm."² He owned no slaves.³

Holt joined the Suggsville Greys, a volunteer company from Clarke County, before the firing on Fort Sumter.⁴ He saw service in the West only, his military activities having been confined to the states of Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Georgia. From April 11, 1861, to February 26, 1862, he was stationed at Fort Morgan and Fort Gaines,

¹ This paper was read at the annual meeting of the Alabama Historical Association, University of Alabama, April 16, 1949.

² Letters, Alma DeWitt to this writer, Clarke County, November 28, 1948; January 12, 1949. Miss DeWitt, who owns the Papers, is the granddaughter of Hiram T. Holt. She lived with her grandmother until the latter's death in 1939. Part of the data contributed by her comes from the family records and part was told to her by her grandmother. For this information and for permission to use the letters the writer is most grateful.

³ Interview with Miss DeWitt, August 24, 1948. There is only one reference to slavery in the Papers. On December 2, 1861, in a letter to his wife, Holt implied that he did not feel it his duty to fight while some "who stink with Africa" stayed at home.

⁴ The exact date of Holt's enlistment is unknown, but his name appears on the roster of the Suggsville Greys, dated March 4, 1861, in T. H. Ball, *A Glance into the Great South-East, or Clarke County, Alabama and Its Surroundings, From 1540 to 1877* (Grove Hill, Alabama, 1882), p. 264.

Alabama.⁵ Sometime afterwards he was sent to Fort Pillow, Tennessee, where he was under bombardment for eighteen days and nights. However, he was evacuated before the Fort fell, and returned to the vicinity of Mobile. During the summer of 1862 he was assigned to the 38th Alabama Regiment and with this regiment, during the spring of 1863, he was transferred to the Army of Tennessee. There he took part in the skirmishing around Tullahoma, in the retreat across the mountains to Chattanooga, in the battle of Chickamauga, and in the early phases of the fighting between Chattanooga and Atlanta. He was killed on picket duty February 24, 1864, near Dalton, Georgia.⁶

The Holt papers consist of 176 items—134 letters and 42 miscellaneous items, including a furlough, a school contract, a record of family births, a few personal notes, a naughty verse, and a number of unclassifiable fragments. Hiram Holt was a prolific writer. There is evidence that the letters preserved are but a fraction of the total number he penned to his wife.⁷ In addition, he wrote many to the other members of his family,⁸ a few to newspapers, some poetry, letters for other soldiers, and a number of chapters of an unfinished novel.⁹

His letters to Carrie are by far the most interesting. The first was written from Fort Morgan, Alabama, April 11,

⁵ Letters, Hiram Talbert Holt to Angeline Caroline Holt, April 11, 1861-February 26, 1864, *passim*. Hereinafter, all letters cited, unless otherwise noted, are from Holt to his wife.

⁶ Letter, Alma DeWitt to this writer, Clarke County, January 12, 1949.

⁷ In a number of places Holt refers to letters which were lost and never reached Carrie. On June 30, 1862, he wrote of having written "two or three letters a day." In the collection there are no two letters dated the same day. From the date of his enlistment to April 25, 1861, Holt wrote twenty-four letters, of which only four have been preserved.

⁸ Only five letters to other members of his family have been saved. There are innumerable references to others, however.

⁹ December 12, May 29, October 27, November 7, 1861, respectively. The novel was entitled "Talbert and Carrie," written under the *nom de plume*, "Talleyrand." Holt mentions having written letters to the Clarke County *Democrat*, the Mobile *Tribune*, and to Bragg's *Circular*, evidently an Army newspaper.

1861; the last, from Dalton, Georgia, February 17, 1864, only a week before his death. They are upon twenty-one different types of paper, varying in size and quality from small sheets of excellent blue linen to yard-length newsprint of neither color nor quality. The letters vary in length from a few lines to fourteen pages, and only small parts of a few are illegible. The style of them varies—when he wrote “common chit-chat,” he employed an easy conversational style; when he wrote news, he was terse, clear, and business-like; but when he endeavored to teach a lesson or preach a sermon, he used the stilted, formal style of the ante-bellum orator. In the three-year period, Holt wrote upon many widely different subjects: of the “marking of shoats” and of life beyond the grave; of great battles and the number of his baby’s teeth; of the beauty and grandeur of nature and the persistence of the itch; of bad officers who drank too much and good officers who “granted furloughs”; of the glories and mercies of God and the immorality of his companions—all these and anything else which came before his observing eye or stirred his fertile imagination. Among the subjects of greatest interest to Holt as a soldier, and consequently the subjects upon which he gives the most specific information, were health, food, clothing, money, and army officers and enlisted men. Since, to use Holt’s own words, “The first duty that I know is to write to you, that you may see that I am safe and well,” and since he did not “try to hide bad things from” his wife, his letters are filled with detailed accounts of his own health and the health of his fellow soldiers.¹⁰

Although he was a prudent man and often reported that under the most difficult circumstances “I remain remarkably well,”¹¹ Holt nevertheless had his share of diseases. The

¹⁰ May 21, 1861; May 10, 1863.

¹¹ June 16, 1862; see also, January 4, 7, 13, July 2, 1863.

flux, diarrhea, dysentery, colds, and chills were his most common complaints. He also wrote from time to time of lumbago in the loins, jaundice, liver disease, stomach cramps, rheumatism, neuralgia, headaches, the itch, blistered feet, and "a plain back door trot." In addition, he was wounded in the heel in a mock charge, was salivated by a doctor, and was nearly killed by "taking a fine chance of quinine."¹² A few of his troubles were serious. For instance, at one time he had the highest fever ever known at Fort Morgan, and once diarrhea reduced his weight from 140 to 114 pounds.¹³ The other soldiers of Holt's company had all the diseases which afflicted him and some additional ones, among them pneumonia, measles, and "all sorts of venereal diseases."¹⁴ Although there were many times when he reported the health of his fellows as good, his letters, especially those from Fort Morgan, are filled with such comments as the following: "Great sickness in our army. Many dying daily . . ."; "One poor fellow died yesterday, another will by night . . ."; "One man died here day before yesterday, making two since we came here, Pneumonia & measles did it"; "Tom Webb died yesterday morning, health still bad here"; and "Calvin Johnston died yesterday in a few hours."¹⁵ Perhaps his worst health report of the entire war came from Fort Pillow, Tennessee: ". . . most all our company are sick from imprudence, in one regiment of 800 there are only 80 well."¹⁶ There were also rumors of both small pox and yellow fever.¹⁷

Holt also often gave interesting reports of camp accidents: "Lieutenant Casey Seargent Thompson & three other, left

¹² November 3, 1861; July 12, 1862; November 1, 1861.

¹³ November 1, 9, 1861.

¹⁴ Although there are a number of hints of the presence of venereal diseases among the soldiers, the term venereal diseases is used only once in the letters (November 20, 1861).

¹⁵ June 10, July 22, May 23, 1861; July 12, 1862; December 25, 1862.

¹⁶ April 29, 1862.

¹⁷ August 30, December 1, 7, 1862; January 15, April 13, 1863.

this fort in a little boat for fort Gaines . . . this morning, Casey's coat came floating by on the tide, so all are drowned!"¹⁸ From Fort Pillow he wrote, "Yesterday a shell struck a fellow & litterally tore him into fragments, you could find pieces of him scattered all around." And from Mobile he reported that "five men of Lewis's Regiment found a supposed bottle of brandy, drank it, and died in less than 40 minutes after drinking it, it was poison."¹⁹

But the pains which Holt suffered from his own diseases were small indeed compared to the pains of anxiety which he felt for his wife and baby. To a not uncommon agony of mind his vivid imagination added all the morbid details. Once, upon receiving news that his wife was sick, he wrote: "Oh! what lonely dreadful hours are these . . . I . . . see . . . you on a sick bed. Suffering and groaning . . . or worse I fancy you perhaps just dead My God what a thought! how it crazes the brain . . ." ²⁰ He also often feared that Alma, his baby daughter, might die. From Fort Pillow, after weeks without a word from home, he wrote: "Ma kiss our sweet little girl for me if she lives, and if she's dead have her buried nicely & plant two cedars or weeping willows at her grave one at head & feet."²¹ Although both Carrie and Alma were at times sick, their illnesses were apparently never severe. In fact, there is a touch of irony in Holt's worry about the deaths of his wife and baby: Alma survived him sixty-four years, Carrie seventy-five.²²

Next to health, Holt wrote of finances, of pay which he had not received, of money which he was sending home, and of the opportunities which the war conditions presented for making more. His soldier's pay was apparently always in

¹⁸ December 2, 1861.

¹⁹ April 29, June 4, 1862.

²⁰ February 9, 1863.

²¹ April 26, 1862.

²² Alma DeWitt to this writer, November 28, 1948.

arrears;²³ and, since during most of the war he was without additional income, he was often "broke." During the first weeks of the war he reported that he had no cash at all, not even enough to pay for paper and postage.²⁴ Although he tried "to keep a little money to pay the postage & letters" to his wife, he was not always able to do so. And on November 3, 1861, he wrote: "Next pay-day I will send you money to pay my letters out." Evidently he received some pay before the end of 1861, for on December 29 he added, "I feel less compunction now in writing to you, that I know you have some money at command." Obviously, his financial troubles were due apparently to the failure of the Confederate government to pay him on time and not to his spend-thrift habits, for he was a careful spender. He actually refused money from home, and in one period of four months he reported that he had spent "but 2 dollars personally."²⁵ He made every effort to send money home, the amounts varying from "a dollar or two" to several hundred dollars.²⁶ Most of the time he left the spending up to his wife's judgment, but once he warned her to lend the money to "no living soul except our parents mind that."²⁷ Often his money was lost in transit.

Although Holt sold at least one pair of pants which Carrie had made in the early part of the war, he did not become interested in earning money until the summer of 1862. At that time he saw, or thought he saw, "a fortune" in the cloth trade and in soap-making. On one occasion he wrote, "Carrie I want you and ma Emily & as many others as you can get, to send all the Gray cloth you can make to me and I will sell it for three times as much as you can get it for at Corner. Tell

²³ May 13, July 29, November 20, 1861; June 10, September 6, October 25, 1862; June 15, 1863.

²⁴ April 11, 1861.

²⁵ June 15, 1863; September 6, 1862.

²⁶ February 17, 1864.

²⁷ January 15, May 7, 1862.

Josey . . . to go and buy up all the gray Janes he can . . . & sell it in Mobile . . . on every hundred yards he can make a hundred or two hundred dollars." The following week he added, "Carrie tell Josey to put you all to making soap as hard as he can. For you can get from a Dollar to a Dollar & a half a gallon for common soft soap. It would not take but two or three days to make a hundred Dollars! People that can stay at home now and don't make a fortune, it is their own fault."²⁸ Afterwards, he did not again mention soap-making; but occasionally he reported that he had sold "the pants," the coat," or other articles which Carrie had sent him.²⁹ During the winter of 1863-64 he evidently went into business on a rather extensive scale. While in the hospital at La-Grange, Georgia, Holt again turned his attentions to money matters: "The people at home enjoy some fine advantages now. They may make lots of money and pay all their debts, this should be done by all means. . . . If I were at home a few months I should make money enough to pay every cent I owe, for money will fall flat at the end of this war. Make me no blanket as you propose doing, but sell it for the money, which keep, or pay debts. . . ."³⁰

Since the Alabama soldier was not permitted to come home and make money, he decided to earn it in camp. His last letter to his wife, dated February 7, 1864, was devoted almost entirely to business. He requested her to send or have other members of the family send him meat, hogs, butter, and "all the Gutta Percha you can find," marking every item carefully with the exact price. In the same letter he wrote of sending Carrie \$200 and added "You see we are making some money too." Hence, at the time of his death Holt was evidently engaged in the money-lending business. Indeed, his last preserved letter, a short one addressed to

²⁸ August 30, September 6, 1862.

²⁹ February 17, 1864.

³⁰ November 20, 1863.

his father, Lewis Holt, was wholly about money matters: "Feb. 18th, /64 Father, the man who has most of my money borrowed is gone from camp to day & I can't get it. I wanted to send you a hundred & fifty dollars but can't unless he comes back soon, use what I send as directed, Yours affectionately Talbert."

For Private Holt, as well as for all other soldiers, food was a matter of first importance, and he was not always pleased with army fare. Although he once reported "Entire weeks have passed without getting as much to eat as I could eat in one day,"³¹ he seemed not to have suffered greatly because of a shortage of food. In fact, he often reported plenty,³² and, at least once, shortly after he joined the Army of Tennessee, near Tullahoma, he burst forth in praise of army rations: "We get plenty to eat, plenty to eat this army gets fed well enough for any and all purposes in the world."³³ But he also did some grumbling. Some of his complaints were typical army "gripes," such as, "Little to eat. . . . It is good enough for soldiers, others think so, I guess." Other complaints were against the quaint methods used by the Confederate bakers in mixing bread. "Our fare was better yesterday," he wrote on one occasion, "for some time it has been a disgrace to a good degree. In fact, our bread was made up by feet and that in a trough where a slut had puppies." Once he grumbled about being fed the tough beef of an old bull "too old for the conscript law."³⁴ In matters of food, however, he was far more fortunate than most Confederates. His family was wealthy enough to furnish him rations, Clarke County's food production being unaffected by the war, and throughout most of his period of service he was stationed near enough home for supplies to reach him

³¹ September 1, 1863.

³² December 5, 1861; January 21, 1862; March 15, 17, April 20, 23, 1863.

³³ May 10, 1863.

³⁴ January 7, 21, June 20, 1862.

safely. His letters are sprinkled with expressions of thanks and gratitude for apples, butter, chickens, eggs, ham, honey, lard, meal, meat, peaches, pepper, potatoes and other food from home. And, finally, he was killed before the period of extreme suffering began in the Army of Tennessee. Only twice does Holt mention foraging: once he told of eating stolen potatoes and once of helping to devour a stolen melon. At another time he confessed to courting the girls a little because it was "true they do some good to the mess."³⁵

Apparently Holt was issued, free of charge, no clothing at all by either the State of Alabama or the Confederate Army during his three-year term of service. In one letter he mentioned the fact that a soldier had given him a coat and in another that he could buy from the government.³⁶ All other references to clothing concern that which Carrie or his family made, should make, or should purchase for him. They were able to supply all his needs, except during the early fighting around Chattanooga, and his scarcity of clothing at this time was due to the fact that the "Quartermaster acted the coward and threw away all our things" and not to the lack of industry of his family.³⁷ However, they promptly sent him new clothing. "Oh! I feel so grateful to you, my people all, my God! I have so much to be thankful for . . . , " he wrote, and in his last letter to Carrie he thanked her for socks, gloves, and a comforter, frugally advising her to sell clothing which he did not need.³⁸

Holt was more fortunate in the matter of clothing than were many of his companions, who were not only without money but destitute of shoes and apparel. When the ladies of Sugsville supplied some of the soldiers with clothing, Holt reported that he did not accept any because "I didn't

³⁵ July 29, June 27, July 12, 1862.

³⁶ September 15, 1863; February 17, 1864.

³⁷ July 6, 1863.

³⁸ September 15, 1863; January 29, February 17, 1864.

need them" and "I feared that people would . . . draw rong conclusions about my family."³⁹ Carrie made more than enough clothing for his needs; and he often advised her to "Sell pants you made for me. Sell Coat you made for me."⁴⁰ In his last letter to her, February 17, 1864, he wrote, "You spoke of sending me clothing, not if you can sell them. I can get from the Government cheaper." Carrie was unable to make his hats and shoes, but she supervised the making of them. On one occasion, he wrote: "I wish you would send to Dalbergs and have two pairs of shoes made one pair of 9s and the other 10s," both of these "with extension soles." Two months later he added, "I want old man Moore to make and send me a hat, as quick as he can . . . I believe a Beaver one to be the cheapest in the long run. . . ."⁴¹

Although Private Holt often expressed a deep appreciation for the kindness and justice shown him by his officers, he nevertheless wrote mostly of their excessive drinking and personal appearance. Significantly, he commented mostly about officers whom he had seen. He mentioned General Lee never, General Jackson only when he was wounded, and Braxton Bragg, Joseph E. Johnston, and Albert Sidney Johnston in but vague, impersonal ways, as a part of the war news. Upon his immediate superiors, however, his comments were neither impersonal nor vague. Holt evidently felt that drinking among the officers was the greatest curse of the Confederate Army. Of his own regiment he once wrote: "We have got as fine a Regiment as you ever heard tell of, saving the highest officers, who drink too much. . . . " Of an officer who drank himself to death, he gave the following terse report: "Major Tucker is dead. He was a bad man, died very suddenly, he was used to drinking a great deal this killed him." According to Holt, one officer even appeared

³⁹ April 25, November 20, 1861.

⁴⁰ September 22, 1861.

⁴¹ June 30, August 22, 1862.

on the drill field drunk: "Last night Col Maury took us out at 7 & drilled or attempted to drill us till nearly 10 oclock he was perfectly drunk. I never saw a more shameful thing, his soldier do not like it & our officers say they will report on him." He even went so far as to blame the loss of the Battle of Cumberland Gap on the drunkenness of the Confederate commander.⁴² Holt was equally strong in his condemnation of other types of moral laxity among officers. Upon learning of the death of General Earl Van Dorn, he wrote Carrie: "Gen. Van Dorn was killed yesterday. I learn for tampering with a fellow's wife, if that be the case he was served right, you will hear particulars soon I guess."⁴³

Keenly interested in the personal appearance of generals and other famous Confederates, Holt reported, soon after his return from Fort Pillow, "I have seen Major Generals Van Dorn, Price, J. C. Breckenridge, who by the way is the finest looking man I ever saw. I saw the famous Capt. Morgan, who is the strangest looking and save Breckenridge the finest looking man I ever saw. Both Morgan & Breckenridge make you think of those wonderfully perfect characters you read of in novels. Morgan is a wild romantic looking fellow, you never tire looking at him." Of the officers who drilled or inspected his brigade, he gave "his Carrie" a report: "Carrie we have a grand Brigade drill every evening now, all the army of Mobile are brought together and drilled by a Brigadier general. Gen Jones is a very common looking man, who rides just like he had a boil on his stern! Gen Forney is a Monstrous fine looking man! Beauregard is to inspect us this evening. There is nothing remarkable about him, save a good eye & broad intellectual forehead. In fact he is not near so fine looking a man as your better half."⁴⁴

⁴² July 16, May 12, June 22, 1861; January 25, 1862.

⁴³ May 8, 1863. According to the *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1936), XIX, 185, General Van Dorn was shot and killed by a personal enemy as he sat at his desk in his headquarters at Spring Hill, Tennessee.

⁴⁴ May 1, June 23, 1862.

Holt's descriptions of private soldiers are no less vivid than those of officers. Again, he was most interested in their moral conduct and personal appearance. He had not been in the army long when he informed his wife, "We have the tallest & lowest men in our company of any in the fort." At another time, obviously amused, he returned to the same subject: "The people here are of all descriptions. The handsome the ugly the lame the fine-formed, the high the low the rich the poor the noble & the ignoble. As Doyle says some must have been sworn to by both parents so small others so high they have to get on their knees to scratch their heads. You find some gentlemen a great many rascals, who can really steal [while] you [are] looking at them their avocations too are various some cursing some singing some whistling, hollowing talking laughing cooking washing sleeping writing reading drilling fighting and every thing else you could by any chance invent to your mind' eye." A few months later, he again returned to the same subject, but, obviously not amused by those around, he reported: "Carrie this is the worst place I ever dreamed of in my life. You can hear nothing but horrid oaths and blackguard as well as indecencies of every kind. There is hardly half dozen out of all but what are of this class. Don't talk about our noble soldiers anymore. Don't be sorry if they do get hurt, they deserve death, notwithstanding they may be brave men. I get so angry with them sometimes I could break their bones, it bothers as well as terrifies me. There are also here all sorts of venereal diseases acquired by imprudent communications."⁴⁵ By March 10, 1863, however, he felt that there had come an improvement in the "morale" of the men and, June 15, 1863, he stated: "There is a good deal of religious feeling manifested in our Regiment. Durden Daniel, Pa Martin and the Notorious Alf Keel, all there in our tent, save church

⁴⁵ May 23, June 21, November 20, 1861.

members, are under conviction and have gone to praying in earnest."

Although Holt was angered because the men around him talked of "little else than vulgarity, profanity and foolishness instead of the greatness, goodness, mercy, and majesty of our God,"⁴⁶ he never lost his broad sympathy for them in their troubles, his admiration for their courage in the face of danger and privation, and he never gave up trying to save their souls.⁴⁷

Private Holt had a good soldier's contempt for deserters. In the fall of 1862 he wrote his wife: "Many deserters are all through your country, look out & catch all you can it pays to catch them, besides they ought to be dealt with." A year later he stated specifically the manner in which he felt a deserter should be "dealt with": "It is thought that John Bennett and Aaron Buckaloo has deserted, if so let the people shoot them just where they find them. At the battle the other day we took a deserter that was fighting in the ranks of the enemy we shot him of course." However, when he saw a deserter whipped and branded, he could not help being sorry for him. "I have just returned from seeing a deserter dealt with," he wrote. "His shirt was taken off and 39 strokes with cowhide applied to his back which brought the blood freely, then he was branded on the forehead with the letter D. He screamed prayed and reared around generally. I felt sorry for him."⁴⁸

Private Holt thought not only of the present but also of a future. In a six-page letter written on July 17, 1861,⁴⁹ at a time when he felt that he was going to be ordered to

⁴⁶ Letter, Holt to Harriet and Drucilla DeWitt, July 19, 1863.

⁴⁷ Letter, Holt to Father DeWitt, December 19, 1863.

⁴⁸ November 25, 1862; October 6, 1863; September 8, 1862.

⁴⁹ The exact date when Carrie came into possession of this letter is uncertain. Holt did not go to Virginia in the summer of 1861, as he had expected and, obviously, he did not carry it with him on his various campaigns. Perhaps, he sent it to his wife when he left Fort Morgan in the spring of 1862.

the front in Virginia—a letter which was to be delivered to her only upon his death—he gave detailed instructions regarding a number of things. He enjoined Carrie to put her faith in God, cultivate her mind and to teach Alma, not only from books but also the ways of virtue and truth. Then he added: "Carrie Let me advise you the best I know. Marry the best man you can do all you can to love him & make him happy. Let your reason dictate to you, who, and when to marry. Keep yourself neat & cleanly, no man or real gentleman can or will love you or respect you without it."

Angeline Caroline Holt kept her faith in God, cultivated her own mind, taught Alma both books and the ways of virtue and truth, and kept herself "neat and cleanly"; but one piece of her late husband's advice she did not take: she never married again. For seventy-five years, almost to the day, she remained true to his memory. She died January 11, 1939, at the age of 97.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Interview with Miss DeWitt, August 24, 1948. Mrs. Holt, after her husband's death, taught school for many years. There is among the Papers a school contract, dated October 2, 1870, in which a number of patrons agreed to employ "Caroline Holt to teach school . . . near J. J. Tompkins." Miss DeWitt regarded her grandmother as an excellent teacher. Two of Alma's school themes, on the subjects of "No" and "Andrew Jackson," are among the Papers. Both indicate that Alma, then fifteen, had been well taught.

Notes And Documents

ELYTON, ALABAMA, AND THE CONNECTICUT ASYLUM:
THE LETTERS OF WILLIAM H. ELY, 1820-1821

Edited by W. STANLEY HOOLE

Elyton, Alabama, incorporated December 20, 1820, and now the oldest section of the City of Birmingham, was named for William H. Ely of Hartford, Connecticut, who earlier in that year had come to the state to locate and sell public lands donated by the United States government to the Connecticut Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb.

Ely was a man of many parts. Born in Guilford, Connecticut, January 10, 1767, the son of Reverend Richard and Jerusha Sheldon Ely, he was graduated from Yale College in 1787. For a short while thereafter he studied medicine, but soon quit the profession to enter the shipping business. Having mastered navigation, he bought and sailed his own vessel to the East Indies and to Holland, where he lived long enough to learn the Dutch language. At an early age his various commercial enterprises made him independently well off and, retiring from active business, he devoted himself to charitable and philanthropic endeavors. Particularly was he interested in internal improvements and one of his favored projects was the opening to steam navigation of the Connecticut River as far north as Barnet, Vermont. In 1811 he married Clarissa May Davis, youngest daughter of Major Robert Davis of Boston.¹

A few years later Ely began to evidence a keen and sincere interest in the Connecticut Asylum, an association which

¹Charles W. Darling, *Memorial to My Honored Kindred* (Utica, New York, 1888), pp. 77-78.

had been formed by citizens of that state in 1815 "for the purpose of establishing a school for the instruction of the deaf and dumb." Incorporated by the Connecticut legislature in May, 1816, it was reputedly the first institution of its type in the United States and until 1819 was supported wholly by charity.² In that year Ely, then quite active in the work of the Asylum, was appointed "Commissioner" by the Board of Trustees. And as such he was personally instrumental in persuading Congress to donate "a township of land . . . to be located, under the direction of the Secretary of the Treasury [William H. Crawford], in tracts of not less than four entire sections each . . ." to the institution.³ The bill was first introduced in the House, February 22, 1819, by Nathaniel Terry of Connecticut, read the second and third times, March 1, and passed, as follows, March 3:

"An Act in behalf of the Connecticut Asylum for the Deaf and the Dumb. Be it enacted, & c., That there be granted to the Connecticut Asylum for the education and instruction of deaf and dumb persons, a township of land, or a tract of land equal thereto, to be located, under the direction of the Secretary of the Treasury, in tracts of not less than four entire sections each, in any of the unlocated lands of the United States to which the Indian title has been extinguished; which land shall be and forever remain to the use of said asylum, for the education and instruction of deaf and dumb persons; or, if said asylum shall sell said land, which they are authorized to do, the money arising from such sale shall be and remain forever to the same use. Approved, March 3, 1819."⁴

² *Annals of the Congress of the United States*, 15th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1818-1819 (Washington, 1855), pp. 1329-1330. In 1819 the Asylum had more than fifty "pupils" from the New England, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky who were being taught by five instructors. The tuition was \$200 annually. The institution was "open for the reception of pupils from every part of the Union," but its funds were "too small to admit of its becoming extensively useful."

³ A "township" was "six miles square . . . within, the township is sub-divided into thirty-six square-mile sections, and these, in turn, into minor rectangles of any desired size" (James Truslow Adams, editor, *Dictionary of American History*, IV, 181, 373, New York, 1940).

⁴ *Annals of Congress*, 15th Cong., 2nd Sess., pp. 1329-1330, 1427-1428, 2513.

On March 2 the bill was sent to the Senate, was twice read and the next day passed into law.⁵

In late 1819 Ely, formally designated by the Board of Trustees as their agent and charged with the responsibility of selecting and selling the lands and crediting the proceeds to the welfare of the Asylum, left Hartford on the long and hazardous journey via Washington and Knoxville to the newly-created State of Alabama.

He arrived early in 1820, visited Huntsville, Carrollsville, Tuscaloosa, Cahawba, Jones Valley and other communities, including the then unnamed village of Elyton from which he was later (January 6, 1821) to write his wife: "I am very happy to tell you that my former Acquaintances here rec'd me in a respectful & friendly manner. And through their influence the late Legislature of this State passed an act incorporating the place as a Town with, to me the complimentary name of Elyton,⁶ which is established as the Seat of Justice, or County Town, of this [Jefferson] County."⁷

With the help of General John Coffee, Surveyor General of the Alabama Territory, Ely soon began "an exploring tour thro' the Country," making his "Selections." He "viewed some land on the Blackwarrior [*sic*] & in some other Places in the Middle and lower part of the State," designating sections in Jones Valley (April 20), in a "Place called Hardin's Settlement about 30 Miles below this [Tuscaloosa] on the Black Warrior" (May 13), in "Colbert Reserve" (see letter, February 3, 1821) and doubtless in other places. Meanwhile, he

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 278-280, 282.

⁶ *Acts Passed at the Second Session of the General Assembly of the State of Alabama . . .* [1820], (Cahawba, 1820), p. 71.

⁷ Ely forgot to mention that the honor came to him not altogether through friendliness. He had previously donated to the county a quarter section of land "on condition that the courthouse should be erected there" (Willis Brewer, *Alabama: Her History, Resources, War Record and Public Men, from 1540 to 1872*, Montgomery, 1872, p. 290).

was also currently selling the newly-acquired property to the highest bidders.

On July 22, 1820, he wrote that he had "the high satisfaction" of reporting that he had completed his "selections of land for the Asylum." But he had yet much land to sell and this was evidently no easy task. For instance, in spite of the fact that Elyton had been named in his honor, he found (February 26, 1821) "the people [of Jones Valley] . . . all from Interest, combined against me, or rather the Asylum, cabaling & laying all the Plans they can devise, to get the advantage of me in my Bargains, and I find it necessary to be wide awake and guarded at all Points & not only to be shrewd & watchful but to walk uprightly & circumspectly, tho' I feel confident that they think they have their match to deal with; I am sure they will not be able to circumvent, & take me in, as they do Uncle Sam, or the U. S., at the public Sales."

Ely probably left Alabama in the late summer of 1821: on June 21 he wrote, "But enough of Alabama, which I am soon to quit forever." Returning to Hartford, he lived until his death, February 21, 1847.⁸

During his approximately eighteen months in Alabama as Commissioner for the Connecticut Asylum, Ely wrote many letters back home to his wife, Clarissa, and to Asylum officials, describing the new state and his work. Fifteen of the letters to his wife, recently acquired by the University of Alabama Library,⁹ and four others, the originals of which are owned by the American School for the Deaf, West Hartford, Connecticut,¹⁰ are recorded verbatim below. Together they present

⁸ A photograph of Ely's grave in Hartford is in the University of Alabama Library. Mrs. Ely died May 7, 1882.

⁹ Ely, apparently a devoted husband and father, wrote at length of his affection for his family and of other personal matters. Much of this has been deleted by the editor.

¹⁰ Photostatic copies of these four letters are in possession of Mr. Will F. Franke, 905 Farley Building, Birmingham, who kindly supplied the editor with typescripts. Mr. Franke also owns a photograph of Ely. The American School for the Deaf is the present name of the old Asylum, which is now in its 133rd year.

an excellent eye-witness account of Alabama during its earliest years of statehood.

Huntsville Feby 20th 1820

My dear Wife,

I have now the pleasure of informing you of my safe arrival here this day in good health tho' considerably fatigued from riding seven days successively on horseback on very bad roads. . . . It is now 40 days since I have heard from my dear Children and almost as many since I have rec'd a line from yourself. You will readily conceive how much I long to see you all, or even to hear from you. I hope you have not been equally unhappy in not receiving my two Letters which I wrote you from Washington, one from Taunton [?], and another from Knoxville in Tennessee enclosed in one to Mr. Day. I had a pretty unpleasant Journey from Knoxville to this place—I had to ride in the rain some days & found very bad accommodations on some part of the road & last night, I lodged in Alabama with 3 other gentlemen in a small log hut, having but one room *only* in which they fitted up 4 Beds in which the Landlady, her 2 marriageable Daughters one small girl & we four went to bed & I have you guess how we were stowed, & when I return I will give you a more particular & ludicrous account.—Tuesday 22d—I have been here 2 days endeavouring to gain correct information in respect to the course best for me to pursue, which I find extremely difficult. Having been extremely disgusted with the noise, filth, dissipation and want of every accommodation at even the *best Hotel* in the place. I have accepted Mr. Boardmans very kind invitation to take a bed with him in his Office & a place at the Table of a private family where he boards. I am now & expect I shall continue to be very comfortably accommodated while I continue in this place. I am much pleased with Mr. Boardman he is an industrious sober intelligent man and is disposed to render me all the assistance in his power.

As I am under the necessity of seeing Genl. Coffee the Surveyor Genl. of the State who resides at Florence, a distance of 73 Miles from here, I intend to set out for there tomorrow or the next day, from whence I must return again to this place. Shall probably be absent 5 or 6 days at least. I hope you will write me frequently to the Care of Mr. Boardman of this Town, who will forward your

Letters to me, where I shall direct. . . . Wednesday 23. The Mail has this day arrived and I have again been disappointed of receiving a letter from you. You don't know how I hunger & thirst to hear from you & our dear little Children & the rest of our Family. I am verily a Stranger in a Strange Land & need something to cheer my solitary heart. Adieu, dear Wife, give my love to Clarissa, William, Mary & Richard kiss them often for me & talk to them often of me & not let them forget me, tell them I hope & expect they will be good Children & give you as little trouble as possible. . . . Your William

Huntsville March 1st 1820.

My dear Clarissa,

I have been made very happy today by the rect. of your long & very affectionate Letter of the 31st of Jany, one Month after its date & a month & a half since the date of your last previous Letter. . . . In my last dated 23d Feby from this place I gave you some account of my Journey hither & of a short one of about 150 miles which [I] was about to perform in order to see the Surveyor General. I returned to this place the day before yesterday having completed it sooner than I expected accompanied by the Surveyor General & have since been waiting here for the arrival of a Surveyor from Fayetteville whom I expect to engage to assist me in exploring the Country & making my Selections. He & probably another respectable Surveyor to whom Genl. Coffee has writen will be here tonight or tomorrow & I shall loose no time in attempting & endeavouring to make a Contract with one of them to assist me & if successful shall proceed immediately on an exploring tour thro the Country, so that you must not expect me to write you again for some time. I hope you will not suffer yourself to be distressed by any apprehensions for my safety, my health continuing to be very good & I am told by Residents in this Country that I need have no fears respecting it, on account of the Climate, be assured that affection for my dear Wife & Children will be a sufficient stimulus to every exertion in my power to preserve it, if possible, from every dangerous exposure, but as all my solicitude can not make one hair black or white, I must, in the prudent use of means, depend for its preservation on the Provider of the Spirits of all flesh. . . . I did not receive my Trunk of Cloaths

from Knoxville by the Boat till today. It is impossible to tell how long it will be ere I shall be able to finish my business here. It is not likely to require less time than I expected, but be assured, my health being continued, I shall not remain in this, to me, joyless Country, one moment longer than is necessary *faithfully* to accomplish the Object of my Mission . . . believe me ever your affectionate
William

Huntsville April 4th 1820

My dear Wife,

Again I have the Pleasure to inform you of my good health & safe return again to this place today from my exploring expedition from about 120 Miles south of here mentioned in my last, & again I have had the *Joy* of receiving another of your very affectionate letters giving me the joyful news of the health of yourself our dear Children family & Friends. . . . It affords me much Pleasure to read the Chit-Chat of our dear Children, about me. Continue to keep me in their Minds talk to them of me, daily & write me the Conversations for the *only joy* I have in this Country is derived from reading your tenderly affectionate Letters, & as you are convinced that I never flatter you, you will surely believe me & confidently trust in my reciprocation of your Affection. Oh how gladly would I *immediately* quit this profligate Country & fly to the Bosom of my dear family, would *duty permit*. I am becoming almost as homesick as a Boarding-School Girl; And I feel almost as if I *could not* make another Journey still some hundred Mils further from my family than I now am, as I must do, to explore the Country below for which I expect to set out the beginning of next Week, tho if my horse should not fail I *may* return here again before I make my *final tour* to the South part of the State. Many circumstances have occurred to render it impossible for me to complete the Business of my Mission as soon as I expected; but be assured that as soon as a *Sense of Duty* will permit, if my health be continued, as I hope & trust it will, I shall instantly commence my return to my Family, who I presume are not more solicitous than myself for that Event. As well as yourself, I have wondered how I could leave the Comforts the enjoyments of Home & my dear family in pursuit of such an adventure as this: But having put my hand to the Plough I must not look back: And I have consolation to think that, while enduring Privations and

hardships, I am promoting the important Interests of a most interesting Charity.

The accomplishment of my Business is dependant in part on so many other persons & events & consequently subject to so many Contingencies, that it is not in my power, as yet, to name a time when I can leave here. . . . I have read, pretty regularly, all your 3 letters addressed to me at this Place to the 27th of Feby, the date of your last, & hope you will carry into full exertion your determination, expressed in yours of the 13 of Feby, of *writing me weekly*, untill you receive advice from me of the time when I expect to leave this Country. Had I been as unfortunate in not receiving your Letters this Tour as I was when I went to Ohio I should have been wretched indeed & still shall be so, unless I continue to receive your Letters. . . . As I have letters to write and copy to the Secretary of the Treasury of the U. S. & the Directors before the Mails departs, I must conclude this which I might otherwise prolong to a Volumn. Tell Clarissa, William Mary & Richard, that the Woods here are full of beautiful blossoms, which remind me of my little animated Blossoms at home, particularly Wm as the, *Sweet William*, grows wild all over the Woods. . . . believe me with the utmost sincerity your ever affectionate
• William

Huntsville 4th Apl 1820

Daniel Wadsworth Esqr
V. P. of the American Asylum
Dear Sir,

I have the pleasure of acquainting you, for the information of the Board of Directors, that I have this day returned to this place from exploring Tour, mentioned in my last, to Jones Valley, distant about 116 Miles from here, where I have made a Selection of 4 Sections, which is all I thought expedient to select at that place, at least at present. My expectations were not realized on seeing the Land, and I was disappointed of the assistance of the Gentlemen I had engaged to aid me in exploring and making Selections in that & the Cahawba Valley, his Business being unexpectedly so situated, that \$100 *Dr* would not tempt him to assist me only 4 days.

He told me I could not make a good Selection in Cahawba Valley from land already surveyed, but that after he should have surveyed some adjoining them, which he was then about to do, he believed I

might make a very good one. And as he and his Brother had surveyed those lands last year & were well acquainted with them, & excellent Judges I concluded to wait till more were surveyed. After he has finished surveying, which he said he shall, between the first & tenth of June, he has promised to assist me in exploring & making Selections from lands, now in course of survey, as well as others,

The more I see of this State the more convinced I am that the proportion of *good land* in it, is *very small*. I rode yesterday over a Tract of Country which for 50 Miles in extent is so broken poor & barren, that were I offered a Patent of all that I could see from the Road, conditioned only that I should settle on it for life, I could not accept it. Yet I am still convinced that this is the best Section of Country to locate our Grant in, for from the best information I have been able to obtain respecting the Southern & Southwestern States & Territories there are no other unlocated lands which sell so high, as good lands do here: But to do it advantageously will necessarily be attended with unexpected delay & Expense, & what new obstacles may arise to prevent its complete accomplishment this Summer, it is impossible to foresee, but be assured my utmost exertions will be made to obviate or overcome them.

In consequence of the *Quantity*, I am obliged to take in a *single* Selection, I have been under the necessity, in making a Selection in, what is called, Jones's Valley, to include some entire quarter Section which may not sell for more than \$1 $\frac{25}{100}$ pr Acre; still I do not despair of selecting such Lands, as will sell, on an average, @ \$5 Dollars pr Acre, unless the contemplated Alteration in the mode of selling the public Lands by Government should prevent it.

I shall by the first Mail forward to the Secretary of the Treasury, a description of the land I have selected, in Jones's Valley, having before forwarded one of those I selected in what is called, Colberts Reserve, and request him to transmit to me a Patent or Patents for them, as soon as convenient, for without them, I cannot receive any Money for Sales which I may make, and it requires six weeks to write to Washington & receive an answer, even by the next Mail. And it is also necessary that the Register of the land office here should send to the Secretary his description of the Lands selected, before he will decide on my Selections: To get *this part* of business done correctly & with dispatch, I find very difficult. I have made conditional Contracts for the Sale of two quarter Sections in Jones's Valley, one @ \$15 Ds pr Acre & the other @ \$16 $\frac{50}{100}$ payable $\frac{1}{3}$ part on the 1st of July next $\frac{1}{3}$

part on the 25th day of December 1821 & the remainder on the 25th of Decr 1822 without interest. And altho the Contracts have undergone all the Solemnities of signing, sealing, witnessing & delivery, conditioned only, on the Approbation of the Secy of the Treasy, yet should they be determined from any cause not to fulfill them, such is the corrupt State of Society here, that it would be worse than in vain to attempt to enforce a fulfillment.

I hope the Board will not suffer themselves to be deceived by *too high expectations*, in consequence of the Sale of those two favorite Quarter Sections. In the Contracts for them I have bound the Asylum to give the Purchasers good & sufficient Security, at the time of making the *first* Payment, that a good Title to the land shall be made to them, at the time of completing the *last* Payment, for which, as well as the [?] they are to give to the Institution their Notes of hand.

This mode of taking Notes for the future Payments, & giving a Bond for a Deed, I have thought preferable, to an interchangeable Agreement: And I have agreed to receive such Money only as is, or shall be, receivable by the General Government, at the Land Offices in this State. The three Banks in this State pay specie for their Bills, which are received at Land Offices, as well as those, generally, of the Banks of Georgia, South & North Carolina & Virginia: Should I refuse to take such Money as the U. S. receive for their Lands, it would be extremely difficult if not impossible to effect any Sales, as they have *little* money here better than the Bills of the above mentioned Banks.

If any of the Measures I have adopted should be disapproved the Board will give me the *earliest Notice* of it. In any event it would give me much Pleasure, in my exile, to hear from them, & to receive an *immediate summons* to return, could I believe such an order would comport with the best Interests of the Institution. I am, Sir, very respectfully

Your obedt servt. Wm Ely

Carrollsville 120 Miles from Huntsville
April 20th 1820

My dear Wife,

I am now on my way down Country to view some land on the Blackwarrior & in some other Places in the Middle & lower part of the State & there being a Postoffice in this Place I stop to embrace this Opportunity to inform you that I am still in fine health &

doing everything in my power to dispatch my Business here in order that I may return as soon as possible consistent with the Duty I owe that Institution whose importants Interests here are committed to my Management. At the date of my last my horse was lame which detained me at Huntsville longer than I should otherwise have remained there, for a Week I never was on her back & she could scarcely walk to water & a slight lameness, still continues, I stoped six days in Jones's Valley, where I selected some land, to endeavour to sell some, & succeeded in selling a few Quarter Sections, but it is slow work to sell them without making a great Sacrifice. I am weary with traveling over Mountains, thro Swamps & Mud & living in the middle of Piles of Logs with no other windows than the large spaces between them (there not being a Pane of Glass to 5,000 People in the Country) of living on Hog & Corn, with a few racoon [?]. Oh how I long to return to my dear family & to a civilised & moral World. May heaven support & preserve us during our painful Separation & may our future enjoyments compensate in some meassure for our present Privations & trials. . . . Tell Clarissa William Mary & Richard that . . . the Deer Rabbits & Squirrels are thick in the Woods & caper around me & that there a plenty of Turkeys running wild. That the *Sweet William*, is still in bloom in the Woods with a great variety of other beautiful flowers which continually remind me of my Blossoms at home. . . . (Peas were in bloom in Huntsville on the 6th Inst)

Continue to write me every Week till you receive advice to the Contrary as it is still impossible for me tell when I shall be able to leave here & wish my dear Wife with confidence that I shall receive your letters, as I presume I have reced all you have written which could have reached Huntsville before I left there. . . . Blessings be showered on you till you shall be permitted to embrace your ever affectionate
William

Tuscaloosa, Falls of Black Warrior
 May 13th 1820

My dear Wife,

Thanks to a kind protecting & preserving Providence I have the pleasure of again informing you of my continued health. My last, of 1st Inst, [?] was written from a Place calld Hardin's Settlement

about 30 Miles below this on the Black Warrior, where I was then employed in exploring the lands, & have since made a Selection of $7\frac{1}{2}$ Sections. Since then I have been down Country about 82 miles below here to a Creek calld Chickasaw Bogue, which empties into the Tombigbee River. Where I stoped was 17 Miles below the mouth the Black Warrior. I was much disappointed to find that I could not do anything advantageously there, in Consequence of the lands not having been yet surveyed, as I had reason to expect. I continued there 3 days doctoring & recruiting my horse which got foundered the Night before I arrived there. It rained more or less every day I was there, & I was so unhappy as an Enemy could wish, and thought I would cheerfully give every cent of the compensation which I may be entitled to receive on my return to Connecticut to be at *once* set down in Hartford. . . . I confidently expect that there are 3 or 4 letters from you at Huntsville, which it has not been in my Power to receive, as I could not tell Mr. Boardman where to send them, not knowing to what part of the Country my researches after land might lead me. I am extremely impatient to return there that I may hear from you, but it is doubtful whether I shall be able to, before about the 1st of June. You will expect that by this time at least I can name a time when I shall be able to leave this Country & nothing would make me happier than to set out immediately to return to the embrace of my much loved Family. This however I can not consistently do, nor can I set a time when I can leave this Country, & it grieves me to say that it will not be till some time in the Month of July, on the most favourable calculation. Often do I reflect with pain on the many cares trials & anieties which you must necessarily experience, in my absence, & would to Heaven that it had been consistent with Duty for me to have prevented them. Do not repine dear Clarissa. Heaven appears to have ordered & directed this Business & hitherto to have smited propitiously on my endeavours to promote the Interest of a most Interesting Institution, & let us trust that the same Power will continue to shield and preserve us all & permit us again to unite our hearts dilated with gratitude for its many mercies to us all.

Tell our dear Children . . . how often I am reminded of my animated Plants at home by the almost innumerable Plants & beautiful flowers which grow wild in this Country, even the Trumpet honeysuckle I have seen in full bloom in the Woods. The Season

is advancing here rapidly, I had green Peas for dinner on the 7th and those considered late, some fields of Corn are knee high, Potatoes in bloom, & the Cotton 6 or 8 Inches high, but the heat at present is moderate, some fields of Wheat are changing to a yellowish hue, & *will be ripe this Month.*

I have traveled about 240 Miles south of the Tennessee River & except at this place have not seen a Pane of Glass in any house & I do not think there are as many Panes of Glass, as houses, in this Place. The Buildings throughout this Country are, almost wholly miserable Log Cabins or Pens so open as not to require Windows either for the purpose of lighting or ventilating them. Even in this Town, which is said to contain 800 Inhabitants, all Squatters, & 20 Stores of one kind or other, there is not one building which in Hartford would be worth \$50, many of them are made by driving Poles or Stakes in the ground & nailing Staves on the outside covering them over head with the same kind of Stuff for shingles the rest of rough or hewed Logs. The Town, as it is calld, is situate on the East Side of the Black Warrior or Tuscaloosa just below the foot of the falls or rather Rapids which as I am told extend continue for about 7 Miles above here & is destined at no distant period to be a place of considerable Importance. I shall be detained here a few days & then expect to go to Cahawba Valley & Jones's Valley, but to which first, I do not know, & thence to Huntsville again. And whether, on account of the many difficulties I have had, & still have to encounter in making my Selections of Lands I shall be able to *complete* them or not before I return is uncertain, but I shall endeavour to do it, if possible. . . . I am not much in the habit of apologising for the *manner* of my letters but I must for this. It has been written in a common tavern room on my knee, there being no table to write on, & at interims from frequent Interruptions.

Adieu, dear Wife, kiss all our sweet Children again & again for me talk to them often about me, keep me alive in their memories, & tell them how I hope & long to see them all. . . . And that GOD may have you all in his holy keeping is the constant & fervent Prayer of your ever affectionate
Husband William Ely

Huntsville 27th May 1820

My dear Wife,

It is impossible for me to describe to you the emotions excited in my Bosom on reading your *six precious Letters*, the last to the 27th [?], handed me yesterday by Mr. Boardman on my return to this Place from my southern Tour. I read them again & again and at every reading discovered something new to esteem, to admire, to love. Often, very often did my Bosom heave with the fond Sigh of Affection & my eyes fill with the pearly drops of Tenderness while reading them & even now while writing, tears irresistibly rush into my eyes & my heart throbs at the recollection of the many tender pathetic & affectionate expressions they contain, the anxious & painful Solicitude which you so evidently feel for my safety & Happiness. . . . Often do I reflect on the Scene of our parting at Sister Darlings, and as often is my heart wrung with Anguish at the recollection. And yet it is not an unmixed Cup of Bitterness, for such is the selfishness of my nature, that the Idea of your agonizing emotions at that time, being the effect of a tender deep & sincere affection for myself distills into it a sweet drop of cordial Balm. And often do I reflect too with deep regret on the many cares trials & anxieties which you must experience in my absence. . . . I rejoice to hear that the Children had to the date of your last been so good & enjoyed such uninterrupted health and fervently pray that Heaven may continue to smile propitiously on all my dear family, but it pains me deeply to hear you say that your Spirits are depressed, to learn that your natural fortitude has yielded in some measure to distressing forebodings & dreams respecting myself. I beseech you to banish such gloomy Ideas from your Mind nor suffer your natural good Sense & health to be affected by them. Heaven has hitherto remarkably preserved me, & I can not but hope that your affectionate & pious Prayers have been & will still continue to be heard for my health & Preservation & restoration to the Bosom of my beloved family. . . . I am sorry you have felt so unhappy at the Idea of my not having rec'd your Letters, but am the more grateful to you for them, from their having been written under the discouraging impression that they would not be recd, & I now thankfully acknowledge the Rect of all I presume which you had written to the 27th of April; And I hope ere the next Mail leaves here, which will not be till the 1st of June to have the pleasure of acknowledging the Rect of another of your

dear Letters. . . . I lately sent Mr. Colt an order on the Cashier of the Hartford Bank for the Dividend which will be made on my Stock in June & also a blank note for the renewal of one I have there which will fall due the beginning of July, & as Mr. Colt *may* want the whole or a part of the Dividend to pay an installment on my Note and as you will doubtless want some Money, I think you had better get Brother Colt to draw some for you of the Directors of the Asylum. At any rate I hope you will make yourself as easy comfortable & happy as the means within your power will enable you to be. . . . Do not suffer yourself to be made unhappy by the Idea of my unreasonably exposing myself in the Prosecution of my Business. Be assured I use all practicable precaution & never estimated my life of more value either to myself or the Public than at present. I hope you will continue to support your Credit for fortitude to the last by being as happy as possible till I return. . . . June 1st My confident expectation my dear Clarissa has been realized by receiving yours & Matildas long & affectionate Letters, as late as to the 7th of May last. To know that yourself and our Children & family were all well & happy only 24 days ago was indeed occasion of *Joy*: And in fact I have no joy in my Pilgrimage but what is derived in your Letters. . . . As I am not able always to have all of them by me I keep the last constantly in my pocket which operates with more force, than would all the Bones & other appendages of all the Saints named in the Roman Catholic Religion, in relieving & removing my pains & fatigues of Heart, Mind & Body. . . .

Your Wm Ely

Huntsville 8th June 1820

My dear Clarissa,

I am impatiently and anxiously waiting here for an Answer from the Secretary of the Treasury to some of the several Letters I have written to him from this not having yet recieved any & without which I know not how to proceed further in my Business.

I am happy to recognise a Kind Providence in being permitted to assure you of my continued health, and hope & pray that its protecting & preserving goodness may be continued to us all till we shall be united in one happy Family—Oh! how impatient I am for this event, I am in a constant state of anxiety—anxious for my

family, anxious indeed for the Success of my Mission, but whatever that may be, I shall have the cordial satisfaction of knowing that all my exertions have been made, with a single eye to the best Interests of the Asylum—I am *staying* here, for it can hardly be called living, in a joyless State, no Wife, no Children to warm my heart & animate its affections, & I now, more fully than ever, feel the justice of the remark that, tho' Matrimony has its cares, yet Celibacy has no joys. . . . I wish I knew and could inform you the precise day when I may leave here but my movements depending on the information I may receive from The Secretary of the Treasury about 800 Miles from here; & who, has not yet paid the least attention to any of the Letters which I have written him on my business, at least as far as I know, altho' the first was written as early as the 20th of March last. And knowing the wants of the Institution as well as I do, & especially after having raised an expectation that I should probably be able to bring a considerable sum of money with me, I dare not return without having first made the most persevering exertions that the expectations of the Board of Directors may be realized. Do not be anxious about my health nor harbour the Idea that I shall unreasonably & unnecessarily expose myself to the effects of this Climate, which does not appear to be of that unhealthy character which we supposed. Should the Answer of the Secy to my last Letter, be such & in such time, as I hope; I may have occasion to go down, once more, to the falls of the black Warrior, which by the way is one of the Pleasantest & healthiest Settlements I have seen in the State, but I shall not probably go lower down the Country than there. You will continue to write me at this Place till I give other directions. . . . Nine days before the date of your last, in which you say the Plants are just springing up in the garden, that is, on the 6th of May, I was eating Green Peas & have for some time past had string Beans, Beats & *new Potatoes*. But tho' not as early, I have no doubt but with your early rising & increasing attention to & Knowledge in Horticulture, that your Plants will flourish as well as those in Alabama, & expect on my return to eat Plants Vegetables & fruits rendered more delicious from their having flourished & matured under the nurturing care of a loved & affectionate Wife. . . . [Your Wm. Ely]

Huntsville 15th June 1820

My dear Wife,

Another Mail, which arrives but one in a Week, direct from Washington, has just arrived & brought me no letter, either from the Secretary of the Treasury, the Board of Directors or yourself. You can not conceive my my impatience at the disappoint & consequent delay which I experience from not receiving any Answer from the Secretary to my letters, written him on the *20th of March & 4th of April last*. I have been waiting here already more than a fortnight in the confident expectation of receiving his answer every mail, not knowing how to proceed to complete my Selections without it. I did expect also to have received a Letter from the Board of Directors, & you may well suppose I was disappointed in not receiving one from yourself; but you have been so very kind in writing me frequently such long & affectionate Letters, that my heart will not suffer me to complain of this neglect, however grateful it would have been to me to have rec'd in my *solitary State* another of your Kind Letters, informing me of the Wellfare of my dear Wife my beloved Children & family. By adverting to the feelings of your own affectionate heart, you may form some Idea of mine, when I reflect on the immense distance which, after such a long & painful separation, divides me from every earthly object my heart holds dear, & without even the Consolation of Knowing when my Business will permit me to commence my return, and to this may be added all the anxiety & perplexity attending my Business. How little Mr. Crawford appears to think of the interest of our Institution? More than an excuse, a very *good reason* will be necessary to reconcile me to this his apparent Negligence.

Untill I know that the Secretary approves the Silutions I have made, I can not receive any money for a part of them which I have *conditionally* sold, nor can I know how much remains yet to be selected; and such are the wants of the Institution that I can not think of returning till I have made every reasonable exertion to relieve them. Do not be alarmed for my health. Thanks to a Kind Providence it is still very good. The People here say this is not a sickly Place & to prove it the Mayor told me this morning that there had least one which person in it died since the year commenced. And the Population is about 1,500.

Without waiting longer for Mr. Crawford[']s answer I intend

to set out on my last tour to the southward, at least as far as Tuscaloosa, or Falls of the Black Warrior, which is a very healthy place, & see what more I can do for the Asylum before I receive advice from Washington. You must not therefore expect to hear from me again for some time, as my Business may call me where it will not be in my Power to write, & you *must not be anxious* about me on that account. I shall take every precedent precaution in my power & trust that that kind Providence which has hitherto watched over me for good will not forsake me while endeavouring to discharge those important duties which it has assigned me, and that I shall be permitted, after having done my duty here, to return to the Embrace of my much loved Wife Children & family. . . . your ever
affectionate William

Huntsville 20th June 1820

My dear Clarissa,

Having concluded, contrary to my expectation when when I wrote you on the 15th, that it would be *expedient* for me to remain here till the arrival of another Mail from Washington, I have again the pleasure of writing you from this Place to inform you of my continued good health, & extreme impatience at the delay necessarily occasioned by, what appears to be, the inattention of the Secretary of the Treasury to the Interests of the Asylum.

Be assured the hours & days roll heavily on. Days are becoming weeks. Weeks Months & Months years, while separated from you. My Situation is anxious & joyless. Often the deep Sigh involuntarily escapes, while thinking of my dear Wife, Children & friends, my native State, & the immense distance which separates me from all on Earth my heart holds dear. . . . I expect tomorrow's Mail will relieve my anxiety by bringing me another of your long precious Letters.

I doubt whether, even you, can conceive my anxiety & impatience to leave this, to me, Joyless Country, & fly to the Bosom of my family, & I assure you nothing prevents my doing it, but a sense of the imperious duty I owe the Asylum. . . .

The Northern Mail arrives here tomorrow & Returns the next day and should I not receive a letter by it from Washington, my disappointment will be *almost insupportable*. I have received nothing

from the Directors of a later date than the 24th of April. I expect I must be detained here till the 15th possibly the 20th of July, after which I intend, if Heaven permit, to return as speedily as possible.

Do not be anxious about my health. The Climate appears to agree well with me, & I am careful to use every precaution in my power to guard against its supposed ill effects, & the Country still continues quite healthy. . . . June 21st . . . Altho the Mail has just arrived from Washington yet I have still the painful & mortifying disappointment of being without any reply from the Secretary of the Treasury to any of my Letters to him; And I am extremely doubtful what course to pursue in order to promote the best Interests of the Asylum. I think however I shall go down Country & endeavour to make some more selections before I receive any Answer from Mr. Crawford, as it is very doubtful whether he will deign to answer my letters before I must leave the Country. You must not therefore be anxious about me should you not hear from me again for some weeks. Write once or twice after you receive this. . . . May the Goodwill of HIM who dwelt in the Bush ever be with you, our dear Children & family is the daily prayer of your ever affectionate
Husband William Ely

Cahawba 22d July 1820

My dear Wife,

I wrote you a few lines from the Falls of the Cahawba River about 10 days ago, and sent it 40 Miles to a Post Office by a private Conveyance to be forwarded you from thence by Mail, but whether it will ever reach you or not is quite uncertain.

I have now the high Satisfaction of informing you that I have completed my selections of Land for the Asylum.

If Heaven permit, I intend to leave here tomorrow for the Falls of the Black Warrior distant about 90 Miles where I impatiently expect to receive some more of your very dear Letters. I may be detained there a few days to complete some unfinished Business after which I shall proceed to Jones's Valley to finish some Business there & then proceed to Huntsville where I shall be detained a few days on Business & then with Heaven's Blessing set out from there for *HOME*. Oh! my dear Clarissa, you can not imagine with what

joyful anticipation I look forward to the Moment when I shall turn my back on this detested State on my return to my own & my fathers native Land, to the Embrace of my dear Wife Children & friends. Oh! my GOD preserve us all and soon permit us to unite in one happy Family and unitedly offer to the Father of the`Spirits of all flesh our fervent Thanksgivings and Praises to him for his many fold Blessings to us.

It begins now to appear as if there would before long be an end to my Toils, hardships, Privations & dangers in this Country & that I may leave it for home by the way of Georgia where I expect I must go to see Mr. Crawford, Secy of the Treasy from whom I have not yet received any communication since I left Washington.

I long to see you, you are continually present to my Mind. I long to see the dear Children & my loved Family. Tell Clarissa, William, Mary & Richard that their dear Father hopes to be home before a great while & to find them all well & good Children to play with them & kiss them a great many times & to bring each of them something as a token [of] his Love & their Merit. . . . With unaltered affection your Husband Wm Ely.

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Tuscaloosa, Falls of black Warrior 29th July 1820

My dear Wife,

I have the pleasure to acquaint you with my safe arrival at this Place, in good health, on the 25th Inst. from Cahawba, the present Capital of the State, situate at the Junction of that River with the River Alabama, & on my arrival had the Joy of receiving your precious Letters of the 30th of May & 23d of June last & had you been as long absent, as I have been, from every earthly Object your heart holds most dear, without hearing from them as long as I had been, you would then be able to form a correct Idea of what my feelings were on hearing, or learning that my dear Wife Children & Friends were all well & continued to remember with tender & lively sentiments of Affection. . . . It is necessary for me to remain here till the arrival of another Mail, on the 1st of August, from that Place; after which I expect soon to leave here for Jones's Valley where I may be detained a few days, & then proceed to Huntsville where I hope to close my business in this Country in short time, & then set out for *HOME*. Unexpected events are continually occur-

ing to procrastinate my continuance here, so that it is impossible for me to name a day when I will leave this Country, but knowing your tender & lively anxiety on my account I shall endeavour to keep you as fully advised of my Situation & business as possible. . . . My impatience & anxiety to leave this detested Country & fly to the Bosom of my loved family are almost insupportable, and nothing but an imperative Sense of Duty to the Asylum has for a long time past detained me here; nor will any other Consideration detain me here a Moment after I shall have requitted myself of that Duty; but I shall hasten with all the Speed that Providence shall permit to meet & embrace all that my heart holds most dear on Earth. . . . Kiss all the dear Children often for me, say everything you can that is Kind and affectionate to them for me—tell them how I long to see & kiss them all & play with them myself, & that I hope GOD will, ever long, grant me that Happiness. Oh! may he preserve us all & permit us once more to unite rejoicing in his Mercy, in one happy family with Hearts suitably impressed with a deep Sense of his Goodness, is the constant Prayer of him who has the pleasure to subscribe himself with undiminishable Affection your Husband, William. . . . I wrote you about the 14th Inst. from the Falls of the Cahawba & on the 22d from the Town of Cahawba, at the Mouth of the River of the same Name, but know not whether you will receive either of them. . . .

W. E.

Elyton, Jones's Valley. 6th Jany. 1821.

My dear Wife,

I have now the Pleasure of acquainting you with my safe arrival here after a very uncomfortable Journey of 107 Miles from Huntsville the Weather having been since I left there unusually cold. The ground is frozen 4 or 5 Inches deep & last [?] a Snowfall 4 Inches deep on the level & it has snowed again this afternoon with cold weather.

I am very happy to tell you that my former Acquaintances here rec'd me in a respectful & friendly manner: And thro' their influence the late Legislature of this State passed an act incorporating this place as a Town with, to me the complementary name of Elyton, which is established as the Seat of Justice, or County Town, of this County.

My Business being very urgent at Tuscaloosa I expect to proceed tomorrow morning for that Place where I hope to arrive the following day & I may not have an Opportunity to forward this to you sooner than from the Post Office at that Place, where In that case I may make an addition to it but I could not defer commencing it here for when writing you I feel almost as if conversing with you. . . . Jany. 7th—I have concluded to leave my Letter here till the Mail passes thro here in the hope that you will be able to receive it several days earlier than if I should take it to Tuscaloosa from which I shall endeavour to write you again & also some of the Directors. . . . Your ever affectionate Husband Wm Ely

Tuscaloosa 3d. Feby 1821

Dear Clarissa,

I am still at this place, having been detained here necessarily on business, much longer than I had expected, but I hope not wholly in vain, as I am now busily engaged in selling some Lands, & surrounded by a number of People who are impatiently waiting for me to attend to their business. I can therefore devote only a few minutes to my dear Wife and Children, just to relieve their anxiety on my account, by informing them of my Safety, & express to you my éxtreme impatience & anxiety to hear from you & know of your wellfare, not having recieved a line from you, or any one from Hartford since I recd yours of the 9th of Dec. last. My anxiety would be much greater had I not learned from the Postmaster here that, owing to some irregularity in the Post Office Department, no letters from the Northward have been received the three last Mails. This affords me some, tho but poor Consolation for the want of that Information which I have been so anxiously & impatiently expecting. Oh Clarissal what may not have happened within those long 56 days since the date of your last? I am indeed an exile from my beloved family and a Stranger to all Joy. . . . The Weather here has been very variable since I arrived there having not been more than 2 days at a time without Rain this week there were three; & the Mercury last Month ranged from 14 to 62 degrees in the Morning, from 27 to 75 degrees at Noon & from 27 to 68 degrees at Evening, & this Evening at Sunset it is at 72 degrees above Zero.

I expect to leave here in a few days with Company for Jones's Valley where I directed Mr. Boardman to send my Letters if he

should receive any by this Weeks Mail. I can form no correct estimate of the Time I shall be detained there but I am extremely anxious to return to Huntsville to attend to the Land in Colberts Reserve which however I have very little expectation of being able to sell. I am making every exertion to leave this Country as soon as possible, but can make no Calculation when I shall be able to enjoy that Happiness. . . . I have written you by every Mail since I have been in this State. I hope you have not been as unfortunate in not receiving mine as I have than which I am sure you have written if possible. Continue to write me often & urge Matilda and Adeline to write me for I have no joy but when reading your Letters. . . . Excuse this hasty scrawl and believe me with increasing affection ever sincerely yours
Wm Ely

Elyton 26th Feby 1821.

Dear Clarissa,

I have again the Pleasure of addressing you from this famous Town tho' I have nothing new to interest you except to acquaint you with my wellfare & that I am making some little Progress in my Business here which however is very heavy & troublesome being surrounded with applicants to buy who are neither able nor willing to give what I consider the value of the Land.

I have no interesting Society, little variety of employment or Scenery, being fixed in a Log Taver[n] (where however, the Family treat me with all the Respect & Civility which I could reasonably expect,) waiting for the Movements of the People, who are all from Interest, combined against me, or rather the Asylum, cabaling & laying laying all the Plans they can devise, to get the advantage of me in my Bargains, and I find it necessary to be wide awake & guarded at all Points & not only to be shrewd & watchful but to walk *uprightly & circumspectly*, tho' I feel confident that they think they have their full match to deal with; & I am sure they will not be able to circumvent, & take me in, as they do *Uncle Sam*, or the U. S., at the public Sales. The Weather has been extremely variable ever since I have been in the State; Cold hot warm, wet & sometimes, tho' very rarely dry, as there have not been, but once, since I arrived, more than *two days*, in succession, without rain, & then only *three* or *four*. The Spring is however coming forward

slowly, some of the early forrest Trees, as well as wild Plants, having begun to put out Blossoms and Leaves. The vernal Season does not here, possess the delightfully exhilarating Character that it has in New England. Nature seems to struggle long & hard, & with severe Paroxisms, to resuscitate the vegetable World from the paralytick & lethargick effects of Winter. The Season is lingering into Life for Months, before it attains to perfect reanimation, & in its most perfect State is greatly deficient of that beautiful & delightful variety of scenery enjoyed at the Northward, from handsome houses, surrounded with neat & pleasant enclosures, verdant Pastures & meadows, interspersed with Orchard, Plowland, & field of winter grain, the whole variegated & beautified by flocks & Heard feeding luxuriously within their respective enclosures, & the full enjoyment of animal Life, & in the Language of their nature offering grateful & sincere Praise to him who bountifully supplies their wants & fills their hearts with Joy & Gladness which may well make their proud owners blush for their own ingratitude and discontent.

But here in the Spring you may travel days in succession, & neither a green field, nor a blooming orchard, shall greet your Eye, & what they call houses, appearing more like the haunts of wild & savage man, than residences of civilized members of Society; no Roads skirted with grass, except the wild grass of the Forrest where the roads pass thro' them; no flocks & herds feeding in verdant fields, but disgusting droves of little half starved Cattle & Swine, roaming the forests for sustenance, and all the enclosed cultivated fields, wholly naked & bare of vegetation, with vast Quantities of dead & decaying Timber on them.

Oh my dear Wife! I long to enjoy another of our beautiful vernal Seasons in the midst of my beloved family Circle & I am doing all I can to expedite my business & hasten my return, but the important Interests committed to my management, & the Duty & high responsibility resulting from my acceptance of the appointment, controul my wishes & desires to return to the Society of those most dear to my heart & with whom alone Life can be enjoyed by me. Public good demands private Sacrifices, and Wisdom justifies temporary privations & hardships for the prospect of greater future enjoyment & usefulness. Unhappily it is not yet in my power to relieve your suspense by fixing a time when I shall be able to leave this Country,

but you will *confidently believe* that my continuance here, will not be unnecessarily protracted.

In traveling the Country I shall continue to take all necessary precautions in my Power to secure my own safety, as well as that of the Property in my care, & this I do when I have no Money by me, as well as when I have, and I hope you will make yourself as easy as possible on this account. I have no Letter from you of a later date than the 5th of Jany, *almost 2 Months*, but I assure myself that you have written me, at least Weekly, & that my disappointment is to be attributed to the irregularity of the Mails. Continue to write me frequently & fully, tell me everything that interests you & I can not fail to be interested. . . . Your's most truly Wm. Ely.

Elyton, 26th February, 1821.

Ward Woodbridge, Esq.r.

V. President of the American Asylum for Deaf & Dumb

Sir:

I have the honor to acquaint you, for the information of the Board of Directors, of my continuance still at this Place, where I have at length, succeeded so far, as to sell several Quarter Sections, all singly, at from \$3-1/8 D to \$10 Dolls per acre, 1/3 part cash, and the Balance in three equal annual installments, from the 1st of March next.

I have been dissatisfied of realizing the Prices I had hoped, but under all existing circumstances, I think I have reason to be well satisfied with the sales I have made.

I have refused \$4,000 Dolls, half cash, and half in one year, for 4 quarter Sections, one choice one, one indifferent one, & two poor ones; & as it would have entitled me to a Commission of \$100 D., had I accepted the offer, I trust that the Board of Directors will do me the Justice, to attribute the error, should it prove to be one, to other than selfish motives. I have had to exert myself constantly, & use all the Circumspection & precaution in my power, to guard myself, & the Interests of the Institution, against the passions, conflicting interests, Cabals & machinations of the Inhabitants, who are either in the occupancy of the Land, or in their vicinity, & wishing to purchase, or rent them: And this continued exercise of Mind & feelings, together with the confinement necessary to guard myself & and the Money, Bonds & Mortgages, I am now obliged to have about me, from danger,

prey on my Health, but I shall not remit my exertions, while I am able to make them, & hope I may be supported and protected.

By the mail which conveys this, I have forwarded to Messrs. McGregor & Darling, of New York, Sheffield and Leavens Draft on Thaddeus B. Wakeman, of that city, for \$1731.50 Dollars, at sixty days Sight, which I have requested them to present for acceptance, & when paid, to hold the Amount subject to either my order, or that of Mr. James H. Wells of Hartford. I trust it will be duly honored. Messrs. Saltonstalls & Starr assure me that the endorsers are perfectly good, & that they they should not hesitate to pay cash for the Draft, did they not want to make a Cash Payment in New York.

I have separate Deeds, Mortgages, & Bonds to draw today, for two Qr Sections recently sold, & after getting them executed & recorded, unless more business here prevent, I intend to return to Huntsville, & see whether it will be possible to make any favorable disposition of the Colbert Reserve Land; after which, if Heaven will, I must return to this place, & Tuscaloosa, to endeavor to complete my Business at those Places. In meantime be assured of my unremitted exertion of all my abilities to promote the best Interests of our philanthropick Institution.

I am, Sir, very respectfully, your obedt Servt, Wm Ely, Agent, &c.

Huntsville, 29th March, 1821

James H. Wells, Esqr

Treasr of the American Asylum D & D &c

Sir:

For the information of the Board of Directors, I have the honor to inform you that I arrived at this Place on the Eveng of the 21st Inst., with a guard of two men, whom I was obliged to hire to accompany me from Elyton, distant about 112 Miles from this, (it being considered very imprudent & unsafe for me to come up without them,) & brought with me, Money, Bonds, Mortgages, & Contracts, to the Amt. of about \$25,000 D. of which I expect to make a Special Deposit in the Huntsville Bank, till I shall be ready to leave this State.

The rest of the Money, Bonds, Mortgages &c, which I have received, I left at Tuscaloosa, in a locked Trunk, inclosed in a very large Iron Chest, at Mr. Saltonstalls. I have sold none of the Colbert Reserve Land, nor have I but very little prospect of selling any of them. The great reduction in the Price of Cotton has alarmed people & they are afraid to buy. In consequence of my severe disappointment from

not receiving any letters from the Board, the Secy of the Treasy, or my family, by yesterdays Mail, I may perhaps continue here, till after the arrival of next week's Mail, & endeavor to make some sales here, before I go down to Tuscaloosa, where I am anxious to be seen, but on account of myself & business being so publicly known, myself at least unpopular, & a general opinion prevailing, that I have much money about me, it is now considered necessary for me to have a guard, wherever I travel in this State, whether I have money with me or not. I must, therefore, take one to & from Tuscaloosa, where I am told the People will probably be prepared, when I meet them again, to make the first Payt on the 2d Contract I made there last year, as well as the one I made that winter. Enclosed is the third of a letter of Exchange, the first & second having been forwarded by former Mails to Messrs. McGregor & Darling with directions to them to pay over the Proceeds, when paid, to your order. I have yet received no Bills of Lading of Cotton, but shall write Mr. Gurdon Burk, to pay to your order, the Proceeds of any Cotton he may receive from Mobile or Blakely, shipped & consigned, in my Name, to him to sell for the a/c of the Asylum. Shall write the Board again after I arrive at Tuscaloosa & earlier if anything important occur. I am, Sir, very respectfully your obedient servant,

Wm Ely, Agent &c

Tuscaloosa, 20th April, 1821.

James H. Wells, Esqr.

Treasr of the American Asylum D & D

Sir,

I have the honor to acquaint you for the Information of the Board of Directors of my safe return to this Place of the 15th Inst., having been detained three days at Elyton by bad weather, high water & want of company; during which time I endeavored, but without Success to complete the Contracts I made when last there, & which ought to have been completed by the 10th Inst. I have however a hope that I shall be able to complete them when I return there, on my way home.

I have not yet been able to complete the second & largest Contract which I made last Summer with Sundry Inhabitants of this Town & Vicinity; I have however been advised by Messrs. Lee & White of Mobile, of their having made sundry shipments of Cotton, for a/c of the Asylum in my name as Agent, & consigned it to Mr. Gurdon Burk

of New York, which is to be sold by him for account of & the Proceeds paid over to the Asylum by my order; & they appear to be making further Provision for completing this Contract, but how soon it will be done, if ever, is quite uncertain. I find the business of receiving & shipping of Cotton for the Land very tedious & troublesome, but hope the result will prove advantageous to the Institution, at least.

I have yet heard nothing from the Secretary of the Treasury. Enclosed are the halves four Post Notes of the Merchants Bank of New York, each for \$100 Dolls payable to Sheffield & Leavens or Order & duly endorsed, which I hope will arrive safe. I have endorsed them payable to your Order. Enclosed also is H. K. Ortleys Dft on A. V. Winans of N. Yk for \$50 Dolls which I am assured will be punctually paid, also made payable to your order.

Annexed is also my draft on Mr. Gurdon Burk at three days Sight for the Proceeds of sixty-five bales of Cotton, shipped him by me, on board the Brig Junius, of which I have advised him, & added the following sentence, "You will please pay to the Order of said James H. Wells, the Proceeds of any and all other Cotton, that has been, or shall be shipped you in my Name, as agent of said Asylum, from Mobile, & his Revt or Receipts shall be good accounting to me for their Amount."

Annexed also is my Draft on Thadeus B. Wakeman^{sr} of New York for \$1,178.93 Dolls at three days Sight, in your favor, of which I have advised him. This is on account of the first payment on the 2nd Contract made with the People here last Summer.

My health is not very good, tho I am able to attend to business, but the constant care & anxiety I experience, both on account of my Business, & the hazard to myself & the Property in my Custody among such a barbarous People, many of whom are incensed against me, & the confinement I find it prudent to subscribe to, never going out here unarmed, pray severly on my health & spirits & render me quite unhappy.

April 21st. I have the Pleasure to inform you that I have this moment completed the Contract I made last Winter for the sale of nine Quarter Sections of the Hardin Settlement Selection. I shall endeavor to keep the Board advised of all interesting occurring instances respecting my Business. Please excuse this scrawl which has been written at intervals with many interruptions, & accept the Assurance of my unremitted exertions for the Interest of our Instituion.

I am, Sir, very respectfully your obedient servant,

Wm Ely, Agent &c

JANUARY, 1950

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Tuscaloosa 2nd June 1821

Dear Clarissa,

Nothing important has occurred since the date of my last to vary my prospects at that time; & having received no Letter from you of a later date than the 18th April, to which I have replied, & having nothing new of Interest to communicate respecting myself, I will endeavour to amuse you by giving you some description of this Place its Inhabitants & c & also some general remarks respecting the People of this State. This Town is situated at the foot of the Falls of the River whose name it has adopted. They are rather a succession of rocky Rapids, of about 2 Miles in Extent, than any considerable fall or falls: In high Fisher Boats can pass up & down them without difficulty. The Town is pleasantly situated on tolerably high, handsome, & generally pretty level rich land; the descent from it down onto the low narrow strip of Land between it & the River is pretty steep, & the low Lands are so cut to pieces by deep steep Gulphs which at times are full of Water, as to be unfit for Settlement. It is but 4 or 5 Years since the *first* white Family settled here & the Population now may be from 6 to 800 Souls, not one of whom, except a few to whom I have sold Land since I came here, have any title to the Land they live on. What they call their *houses*, are either the most despicable rough dirty & uncomfortable rolling log Cabins, or less durable & more mean buildings; most of them without a single Pane of Glass, with scarcely a saw'd board or Plank, Nail or any other Iron about them, all with wooden Chimneys & fire Places & almost as destitute of furniture as of Glass or Iron, some have no floor but the bare Earth, others have split flat pieces of Timber, or rough boards, laid either flat on the earth or on logs or poles lying on the Ground, without any fastening; other again are raised from the ground high enough for Hogs, dogs, Cats & fowls to go under, which is their common place of retreat from bad Weather & I have sometimes been very much annoyed by the growling, squealing, barking, squalling & cackling of those animals under the floor where I slept. This description is too general to give any one who has never seen a log Cabin a definite Idea of them. I will be a little more particular in describing the room I have occupied since the 15th April, some of its attending Circumstances at Major Lewen's Hotel which is the best tavern in this Place & where I have the best accommodation the Establishment affords. This Room is

of the same size as our front lodging Chamber in the 3d Story, (16 by 12 feet) it is an enclosed hovel or Shed on the South side of a 1 Story log Cabin to which is slightly connected & is constructed by setting three crotches in the ground at 8 feet distance from each other & 12 feet from the log Cabin, in these three Crotches are laid one end of three round Poles the other end passing between the rough Logs of the Cabin, on these 3 Poles 5 (five) others are laid lengthways of the Shed to which some split oak stuff 4 feet long like thin Staves are fastened to form a kind of roof, but thro which the Rains at times pour, *literally*, in *Streams*—between the crotches, & 4 feet from them, on the side of the Shed, & also at the end, at the same distance, are round poles about the size of my leg, with one end driven into the Ground & the other fastened to a pole supported by the Crotches: To these crotches & Poles are tacked at each end thin, often crooked, split oak rough Stuff, but 4 long, just as taken from the woods, which from, warping, springing, & splitting, after tacked on, without the least fitting, occasion many large cracks & holes, which your imagination will suggest to you, inconvenient, in wet muddy [weather]. Indeed there are many places where I can run my arm & almost my head outdoors, the floor is of rough rotten or rotting boards laid immediately on the ground, not a pane of Glass. A hole is cut thro' at one end, & some split stuff nailed to wooden hinges, serves for a Shutter, which fastens by a String to a Nail. At the other end is a Door, of similar Materials & workmanship, but I sometimes fasten it by running a Stick into a hole in a Stake to which it is shut, sometime by setting a Chair against it, & at other times it is left, thro' the Night, without any kind of fastening. In this Hovel are 3 Beds, one I have engrossed, since the first week after I arrived, the other 2 are for the accomodation of traveling transient Customers. At the East end, & immediately adjoining my Room, is a Yard or Pen for Horses, Cattle & Hogs, containing from 5 to 25 horses, 10 to 40 Swine & other Stock. Into this delightful Yard, which at times is half knee deep with filth, my Window opens, to delight with the Prospect, & regale with its Perfume, my Senses. And even to increase the Sociability of my Situation, as the horses & Cattle frequently favour me with a familiar Call by runing their heads into the Window, to say *how'de*, & look, as much as to say, you have gotten possession of *our* hovel & we will thank you, soon to give us our own again. At the other end is an open hovel without any pretence

to a floor, which now serves for a dining hall & at the end of that is a log or Pole Kitchen about as tight as a common rail fence; & when the wind is from the West I have, the Priviledge of being beconned by the Smoke which is driven, with perfect freedom, from the fire place, in which they burn their wood 8 or 10 feet long, thro' the Logs into my Room. Majr Lewens Establishment consists of 4 Rooms, & a Kitchen detached, there is no communication between any two of them without going out Doors. One of these Rooms I have already described, two others with each 2 or 3 beds in them are occupied by 2 married Men & their Wives & some Children, & for a Baggage Room, the other is the eating Room, in which there are always 5, sometimes 6 or 7 Beds, beside a number of Lodgers on the floor. The Kitchen!! Oh the Kitchen!!! The filthiest Place you can conceive of being occupied for Cooking, is small, but contains two Beds, in which & on the floor, from 6 to 10 Negroes of both Sexes & various Ages all unmarried sleep promiscuously. But to return to the Town which contains about 20 Stores & little Groceries, or Hucksters Shops,—A few of the Inhabitants are possessed of considerable Wealth & intelligence, four or five keep their Coaches, more from ostentation, than for use of convenience, as the roads absolutely forbid any comfort to those who ride in them. A few of the Ladies dress fashionably & with tolerable Taste; many of them very extravagantly, but without the least taste, & of all People I ever saw they are the most careless of their Cloaths tho' they have to pay very exorbitant prices for them. To neatness & propriety in Dress both Sexes are, generally, grossly inattentive: They all live in dirty, small, Sod & mud Cabins, or in those of a more mean construction, & are generally almost destitute of all the Comforts & conveniences of Life. Bacon, corn bread, or greasy hot half baked biscuits, about as often without, as with vegetatles, with Water, Buttermilk & sour milk, constitute, with Tea & Coffee, for those that buy them, their general Diet. A Coach with 2 or 3 Servants, driving up, with three or four Ladies, dressed in their Crape, Cambricks, Silks, Laces, Leg-horns, Lace veils, white or coloured Kids, to one of these Cabins, the Ladies jumping out into the mud & clambering, perhaps, over a dirty rail fence, & walking, sometimes over over Shoes in mud, to get to it, & then stooping to enter the Door, (as few of them are high enough to permit a Man to enter without stooping,) is a perfect Burlesque on Show & Parade, on good sense & propriety. There

is a Baptist & a Methodist house for public Worship. They are of the same materials & workmanship as most of the other houses. They are mean dirty uncomfortable Places generally left open for hogs & c to enter at pleasure. The Methodist's house is across the Street from where I live—about 3 Weeks since, under the Pulpit, which is a coarse square box raised about 2 feet from the floor, a great old Sow introduced to the Light 6 or 7 fine Pigs. Whether the floor was even swept after it before the next meeting I could not tell as I could not discover that any dirt was missing & two or three times since when the People have assembled there the old Sow, with her pigs placed herself at the Door & claimed & disputed for the right of Possession & a person was obliged to go out *several* times and beat her away from the Door. But little serious attention appears to be paid to Religion in this State, & there is a lamentable want of qualified religious Instructors: There are indeed many Methodists & Baptists who pretend to preach & teach, most of them of the most ordinary education some of them can neither write their Names or read their Bible or any other book. None of them are distinguishable by their dress, & many of them, I am told, not even by their general outward deportment from the common Mass of the Population. Gross, excessive profanity is very prevalent, & appears to be indulged without restraint before their Preachers Magistrates & other peace officers, & indeed many of those Officers themselves are guilty of it, as well as of intemperance. The highest & lowest Classes in Society, the one considering themselves *above*, & the other below the Influence of public opinion, are much addicted to excessive drinking. And to have the reputation of being a brave daring fighting Character, with property, whether with or without Talents, learning, or any other requisites for an office, will enable a Candidate more surely to command the Votes of the Electors than all other requisite qualifications without it. And I am told that one of the Representatives from this Town actually fought himself into the Legislature last year.

Education particularly that of the females is generally grossly neglected. Common Schools are scarce & at very inconvenient distances for many of the Children. Many of their teachers grossly ignorant & immoral. I am told the Females, Ladies I should have said, have almost no taste or inclination for reading, mental accomplishments not being sought after by the other Sex, are neglected

by the females & their whole attention is directed to tricking off their *persons* in the best manner for catching a *man* to take care of, and support them, their Courtships, if they deserve the name, are generally very short, and on the part of the female at an early age, & there is generally very little of either sentiment or prudence in the Connection between the Sexes. Much of the white Population of the State are extremely indolent, either too proud, or too lazy to work, or even think, they disipate their time & money, & would their morals if they had any, without enjoyment, in lounging about Taverns, Stores, tipling and gambling houses, or in making & attending horse races, Cockfights, called here *Chicken* fights, shooting at a Mark, hunting or fighting. Notwithstanding such are their habits I think them a very avaricious People. *Money* is their God, & *Cotton* the *Idol* of their devotions.

Their Government, Habits & manners are more Mobocratic than I have ever anywhere else met with. Judges & boatmen, Senators & Waggoners, Generals & soldiers, Mechanicks, day Labourers, & Vagabonds, all mix promiscuously, however dirty & shabby their appearance, at the same table without the reserve or embarrassment. Each Man feels himself to be one of the *sovereign People*, & acts accordingly. Flagrant Crimes are frequent, but the guilty commonly escape the Penalty of the Laws for there is not enough of a religious or moral Principle in the Body politic to cause the Laws to be put in execution. But Slavery that greatest of curses to the enslaved, is also the greatest curse to those who hold the wretched Africans in iron bondage, whose souls are almost universally as much neglected as tho' no immortal Principle belonged to them, & both whose Souls & Bodies are generally treated as if they were outcasts from their Maker, who neither sees nor regarded them; but their sighs, their tears, their [?] groans, & blood brutally shed, are daily & hourly witnessing a *note* by HIM who has said *Vengeance is mine*, [. . . ?] & whose Phials of Wrath are preparing to be poured over [. . . ?] guilty oppressors, & even now they feel the Curse, the *effects* of Slavery are *interwoven with all their habits of feeling thinking & acting*, pollute their Joys & abortively *incapacitate* them for all refined intellectual & religious enjoyment. But enough of Alabama, which I am soon to quit forever. You will doubtless give me the [?] for having devoted the best part of this day to you . . . but the long hasty Scrawl, which is intended only for you and Friends & which I have

not time to read before it leaves the Office. Perhaps you may cul something out of this to amuse our dear Children, whom I long to embrace & whose affection for me I hope you will be able by kind & endearing expressions to keep in lively exercise. . . . And now my dear Wife may GOD bless you *with Peace of Conscience & Joy in the Holy Spirit*, & every needed temporal Blessing & soon permit to be infolded in the Arms & pressed to the Heart of your affectionate William.

Book Reviews

The Story of Alabama: A History of the State. By Marie Bankhead Owen. New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1949. 5 vols. \$42.50.

Marie Bankhead Owen, for nearly thirty years Director of the Alabama State Department of Archives and History, has in *The Story of Alabama* rendered another significant contribution to the growing bibliography of the state. This massive, five-volume, 3,527-page set, packed to the fullest with information on practically every facet of life and labor in Alabama both past and present, will doubtless stand for many years as a reminder of the fruitful industry and sagacity of a woman whose name in her region is synonymous with cultural progress.

Using as a basis for her new work the four-volume, 3,288-page *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography*, issued in 1921 by her husband, Mrs. Owen has arduously rewritten or edited and often reproduced in full the many subjects treated earlier by Thomas McAdory Owen, the distinguished historian, lawyer, and founder of the Department over which she now presides. That this is fortunate is axiomatic, for the earlier volumes have long been out of print and, as Mrs. Owen declares, her husband "had explored the whole field of research . . . and with a brilliant and analytical mind digested the facts and presented them in simple and chaste language." Mrs. Owen has added much new material, however, most of which deals with the events and personalities of the last quarter of a century. Many articles and essays on various and sundry topics were written, she states, by "numerous other persons, including Federal and State officials, heads of corporations and independent students" These authors are separately credited with their contributions.

The first three volumes of *The Story of Alabama*, written in narrative form, cover the history and geography of the state, its agriculture and industry, legal life and education, and numerous other cultural aspects since the arrival of DeSoto in 1540. A brief sketch of each county is recorded, somewhat after the fashion followed in Willis

Brewer's *Alabama: Her History, Resources, War Record and Public Men* (1872), and there are copious illustrations throughout of important men, places, and events. The fourth and fifth volumes, sub-titled "Personal and Family History," are in reality biographical-genealogical summaries of hundreds of Alabama's leading citizens and in a large percentage of instances, each sketch is accompanied by a full-page photograph.

Volumes I, II, and III of *The Story of Alabama* are indexed in Volume I, and IV and V, paged consecutively, are indexed in Volume V. This arrangement has been found somewhat cumbersome by the reviewer and he believes that, especially in the two volumes of "Personal and Family History," an alphabetical arrangement of the biographies would have been less confusing. A copious bibliography has been given (Volume I) and the "Advisory Council," under whose guidance the *Story* was apparently written, includes the names of thirty-nine of Alabama's outstanding men and women in all walks of life.

Mrs. Owen has quite modestly stated in her Foreword that, "It must be clearly understood . . . that the author makes full acknowledgment to the published works of her husband . . . whose scholarly research and clear statement of fact laid the foundation for the whole of Alabama's recorded history to the date of the publication of his *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography*, 1921. Such of his material as is reproduced has been brought up to date." She need not have written with such self-abnegation: her own efforts have meant much to the usefulness of *The Story of Alabama* and her expansions of and additions to her husband's earlier volumes will serve generously to perpetuate his memory as well as to add further luster to her own name as a chronicler of the state's history.

For individuals and libraries desiring an up-to-date reference guide to Alabama, topical in outline and encyclopedic in scope, *The Story of Alabama* will doubtless fill a long-known need.

W. STANLEY HOOLE
University of Alabama

The Contributions of John William Abercrombie to Public Education. By Jesse Monroe Richardson. Nashville: George Peabody College for Teachers, 1948. xii, 167 pp.

Dr. Richardson has made a scholarly contribution to the educational history of Alabama in the present study. For many years Dr. Abercrombie was the main leader of educational thought and practice in the state. He was born May 17, 1866, in St. Clair County, Alabama. He held the A.B. degree from Oxford (Alabama) College, the LL.B. degree from the University of Alabama, graduating from the latter institution in June, 1888. He was City Superintendent of Schools in Anniston, a leader in the state legislature, President of the University of Alabama, a congressman-at-large for two terms, and thrice state Superintendent of Education.

According to Richardson, Dr. Abercrombie's chief educational achievements were as a leader in standardizing Alabama's schools, in equalizing opportunities among Alabama's counties, in developing a state certification plan for teachers, and in expanding the number of secondary schools. He was responsible for a uniform text book law, and was a persistent advocate for state support of Alabama's elementary and secondary schools, teacher training institutions, colleges, and the University.

Dr. Abercrombie lived during a period when America was coming of age, when the South was recovering from the devastating effects of the Civil War, when public education was making great strides throughout the nation, and when equal opportunities were being demanded by many submerged groups. He was a true liberal, a persistent worker, an astute politician in the best meaning of this term, and a leader who captured the loyalties of men.

Richardson's dissertation not only portrays the work of an educational statesman but also makes a splendid contribution to the history of Alabama's education, during the years which the study covers. Those of us for whom Dr. Abercrombie was sometimes a hero, and always a friend, are pleased that the study was made. The reviewer recommends it as a "must" for students of Alabama's history.

GLADSTONE H. YEUELL
University of Alabama

Southern Politics. By V. O. Key, Jr., with the Assistance of Alexander Heard. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949. xxvi, 675, xiv pp. \$6.00.

For many decades Southern politics and politicians have occupied a downstage position in American public life. In the national con-

gress "progressive blocs," "farm blocs," "labor blocs," and "sons of the wild jackass" rise to the headlines, then disappear; but in session after session the cartoonists drag out their stereotyped southern senator, equipped with string tie, walrus mustache, and stack of filibuster fuel. Typically he is represented blocking, holding back, dragging down, or otherwise impeding something labeled "progress."

Discriminating observers of the species have known better. The differences between Underwood and Tom Watson, Cole Blease and John Sharp Williams, McKellar and Lister Hill, John Rankin and Cordell Hull, Pepper and Bilbo simply do not permit a stereotype. During the New Deal even the casual Washington-dateline reader could spot the Republican leanings of Byrd, Huey Long, and Pappy O'Daniel, and in contrast ponder the strong support furnished Roosevelt by Black, Harrison, Barclay, Joe Robinson, Pepper, Hill, and Byrnes. But armchair observation of these anomalies does not explain Southern politics. What is the Southern politician like? What does he believe? How does he get elected? How does he represent his constituents or administer his job? Who elects him?

To answer such questions Professor V. O. Key, Jr. of the Johns Hopkins University (now of Yale) was secured by Professor Roscoe Martin of the University of Alabama (now of Syracuse University) to direct a broad study of politics in the South. The Rockefeller Foundation underwrote the project, which was carried on as part of the work of the Bureau of Public Administration at the University of Alabama. A staff of professional students of politics, including Alexander Heard, Donald Strong, Merrill Goodall, and Frederic Ogden, under Mr. Key's direction compiled masses of election statistics, laws, court decisions, newspaper stories, and other matters of record, then put in fifteen months interviewing 538 Southern office-holders, party leaders, editors, labor officials, and a cross section of the people who live and work in the South. *Southern Politics* is the report of this pioneer study.

Part One, which makes the best reading, consists of a state-by-state account of the workings of the one-party system. Typical chapter titles are "Virginia: Political Museum Piece,"; "Alabama: Planters, Populists, 'Big Mules' "; "Florida: Every Man for Himself"; "Georgia: Rule of the Rustics"; "North Carolina: Progressive Plutocracy." In these chapters appears much that we already know about the Byrd organization, "Boss" Crump, Gene Talmadge, the Georgia unit system, Longism in Louisiana, the Percys and Bilbos in Mississippi, and the

cross-alignments between planters, hillbillies, organized labor, Negroes, Republicans, industrialists, minorities, and majorities. But it is not a collection of unrelated anecdotes; this section is a reasoned, organized display of the wide divergencies between the states which fade into the "Solid South" when the Negro is concerned. Speculation and rationalizing about the supposed common ties of agriculture, poverty, and Northern financial domination give way before the impressive maps of population distribution, charts of geographical differences in voting, and correlations between voting and various socioeconomic factors. No one can fail to put "Solid South" in figurative quotation marks after reading these chapters.

Part Two describes the South in national politics, with attention to the bolt of 1928, the revolt of 1948, the Southern Democrat-Republican coalition in the Senate, and Southern solidarity in Congress. An impressive device used here is a quantitative measure of solidarity obtained from an analysis of hundreds of Congressional roll calls. Use of this device enables Mr. Key to break "solidarity" down into degrees and kinds, with significant results.

Part Three describes analytically the mechanics of the one-party system, including campaign financing; Part Four analyzes the size and composition of the Southern electorate. Part Five is a dispassionate account of the nature and effects of restrictions on the franchise.

In a brief review it is impossible to go much further even in summary of this meaty book. Alabamians will be interested in the discussions of why the Black Belt remained loyally Democratic in 1928 but revolted in 1948, the extent of friends-and-neighbors strength of candidates, correlations between the percentage of Negroes and strength of candidates county-by-county, the absence of a state machine and the transience of personal factions, and the part played in state politics by county cliques. Of wider interest are treatments of the effect of poll taxes, weakness of the Democratic party organization, effects of increased urbanization and farm mechanization, radicalism inherited from Populism, bonds between the "black belts" of the various states, voter participation in elections, cities versus rural counties, and the cost of becoming governor.

The theme of the book, which is not lugged in to provide unity, but which insistently rises out of the population-and-voting correlations, the newspaper editorials of many years, the campaign speeches, the franchise laws, and other data presented, is that whatever is peculiar to Southern politics is attributable to the Negro. Not that all

Southern politicians wage simple "white supremacy" campaigns as did Cotton Ed Smith; the thesis is much more subtle, and its ramifications lead throughout our political behavior. To understand our politics, Mr. Key thinks one must understand the effects on the whole South of the region-wide strength of the white minorities in the counties with large Negro populations. Significantly, he finds the seeds of future political change in the growth of cities and in the weaker conservatism of the "rim" states, Florida, North Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Texas, which are less preoccupied with the Negro. Since the book was published, Census estimates of possible changes in House representation appear to support such predictions.

Mr. Key is a scholar, not a polemist. Neither he nor his staff took at face value the oratory of campaign heat, nor did they go muck-raking in tempting alleys. If this book is less than a classic, it will still be a definitive job for years to come; and its faults will appear as weaknesses of political science, which is not notable among its sister social sciences for rigor of method, not as weaknesses of its producers. Future historians cannot ignore this work.

JAMES B. McMILLAN
Managing Editor

Report of a Survey of the Libraries of the Alabama Polytechnic Institute, November, 1948-March, 1949. By Louis R. Wilson and Robert W. Orr. Auburn: Alabama Polytechnic Institute, 1949. 215 pp.

This survey of the library facilities at Alabama Polytechnic Institute was made at the request of the President by two well qualified men: Dr. L. R. Wilson, Dean Emeritus of the University of Chicago Graduate Library School, and Mr. Robert W. Orr, Director of Libraries at Iowa State College. These men spent fifteen days on the Auburn campus, during which time they not only scrutinized the inner workings of the library, but also roamed the campus, talking about library services and needs with deans, faculty members and students. Their purpose was two-fold: (1) to describe and evaluate the present organization, services and resources of the library, and (2) to recommend improvements.

The surveyors present their findings in thirteen chapters. The picture portrayed is that of a library which has grown extensively, especially within the past decade, but whose resources, personnel, physical plant and services have not kept pace with the ever-expanding needs

of the Institute. The defects are similar to those which have come to light in other institutions where the library has been more or less taken for granted over a period of years: inadequate financial support, shortage of staff, glaring weaknesses in the collections and unsatisfactory physical plant. All these and many other shortcomings are stated frankly and in detail.

To remedy these defects the surveyors present no less than 82 recommendations. Some of their proposals can be acted upon immediately. Others, such as the construction of a new building, are so far-reaching that they can be carried out only with great difficulty and expense. Together they constitute a bold program for the library, and they deserve the serious study of everyone concerned with the future welfare of the Institute.

ANDREW J. EATON
Louisiana State University

Policy and Administration. By Paul H. Appleby. University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1949. 173 pp. \$2.50.

One of the significant by-products of the Southern Regional Training Program in Public Administration is the annual lecture series presented since 1944 by the University of Alabama. *Policy and Administration*, by Paul Appleby, is the fifth in this series of lectures which has contributed significantly to our knowledge of the art and science of public administration.

The central theme of *Policy and Administration* is the decision-making process in government. Along with a number of other writers in ever-growing number in recent years, Appleby makes clear the unsatisfactory nature of the conception that the legislative branch determines policy and the executive branch administers the policy so determined. Partly a holdover from the legal approach to the study of administration and partly due to the desire of many to square the separation of powers doctrine with reality, the theory of the President and the Congress operating in separate spheres has never been true, even in the first days of the Republic, as Leonard D. White, among others, has made clear.

Accepting the fact that public administrators not only do, but should, participate in the making of policy, Appleby goes on to name administration as one of the eight political processes which he identifies. He points out how problems calling for decisions tend to be more technical in the lower echelons of the government but become

less technical and more "political" as they approach the top level of the executive branch. Especially useful is the point, which the practitioners of public administration can amply footnote, that our trust in "facts" alone to supply the answer to major policy decisions is a snare and a delusion which has led to much fumbling and unwillingness to act. Facts may help in reaching a decision; the nature of the political process is such, however, that they cannot indicate the one best answer.

Appleby has spoken incisively on one of the most crucial phases of the governmental process. The University of Alabama and its Press are to be congratulated for their contribution in sponsoring the presentation and the publication of this and the preceding lectures.

WELDON COOPER

University of Virginia

Mobile: History of a Seaport Town. By Charles Grayson Summersell. University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1949. xii, 81 pp.

Within the compass of this brief study Dr. Charles Summersell has presented the basic events in the history of Mobile, thoroughly documented each important statement and included a good index and an excellent bibliography. His work is the essence of a large volume, which, it is hoped, he will one day write. This summary will in the mean time prove to be an interesting and useful book. Each point brought out makes one desire more elaborate information; and by using Summersell's footnotes and bibliography the reader will find himself following a carefully constructed blueprint.

One could scarcely be expected to do Summersell's book justice in a mere brief summary of contents. A few outstanding matters might be noted, however. The name, *Mobile*, sounds French; but it is actually a French rendition of the name of the capital of the Mobilian Indians—Mauvila or Maubila. Mobile, which was first (1702) located on the Twenty-Seven Mile Bluff on the Mobile River, but later (1811) moved to its present site, served as a the capital of Louisiana until 1722, when the seat of government was moved to New Orleans. Mobile remained a part of the French colony of Louisiana until the latter was ceded to the Spanish in 1763, at the end of the Seven Years' War. By this treaty Great Britain was given Florida, including Mobile. The Treaty of Paris (1783), which brought an end to the Revolutionary War and its European ramifications, gave Florida and Mobile back to Spain, which retained possession until 1813. In that year the town was seized

by the American troops under General James Wilkinson. Thus Mobile had been a colony of the French, of the English, and of the Spanish upward of one hundred years before it came into possession of the United States. Its culture was predominantly French, although the ruling class was Spanish.

Under American rule Mobile grew into an important seaport. It was the entrepot for the entire area of the Alabama River system—the Mobile, Alabama, Tallapoosa, Coosa, the Tombigbee, Black Warrior, and Cahaba rivers and their numerous tributaries. Commission merchants and factors in Mobile handled the cotton and other productions of the large plantations, while commission and furnishing merchants in the river towns bought the products of the farms and smaller plantations and shipped them to Mobile factors. Because of the close economic and social tie between Mobile and the Black Belt, the city had a tendency to support the Whig Party or the more conservative wing of the Democratic Party.

The city suffered many yellow fever epidemics during its long history, and came near being destroyed by fire on several occasions. After the Civil War it was a heavy sufferer from the extravagant financial policies of Reconstruction; and immediately following this experience, the city underwent a continued depression for several years. This was due in part to the fact that the ship channel, because of silting, was inadequate for ocean-going vessels, and in part to railroad competition, which diverted trade to deep water ports. Since Reconstruction, however, the channel has been widened and deepened and, as a result, Mobile has increasingly grown in importance as a seaport and as an industrial center of the South.

All who are interested in the history of Mobile and of Alabama will find Summersell's work indispensable.

FRANK L. OWSLEY

University of Alabama

News and Notices

At Alabama College, Montevallo, the History and Sociology Departments have been combined into a Social Science Division with Dr. Hallie Farmer, former head of the History Department, as head of the Division. Two promotions were made within the Division: Sidney A. Forsythe and Murray C. Flynn were raised from the rank of instructor to assistant professor. Two people who have been on leave for the past year have returned to their positions: Mrs. Mary Whatley, who has been studying at the University of North Carolina, and Miss Lucile D. Napier, who for the past fifteen months has traveled abroad, chiefly in Scotland and England. Mrs. Sigrid Gould, a graduate student at Columbia University last year, has been added to the Division.

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The Birmingham Historical Society presented a sketch entitled "The Relay House" before the Rotary Club, October 17, 1949, in the Terrace Room of the Tutwiler Hotel. A historical marker, which will be permanently placed at the corner of Morris Avenue and 19th Street, the original site of the Relay House, was donated to the Society by Mrs. Margaret Cameron Spain. The Society has also sponsored the erection of a marker on the site of the old Linn Building now occupied by the Brown-Marx Building.

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Under the auspices of the Alabama Historical Association a marker has been erected at Bryce Hospital, Tuscaloosa. Presentation was made December sixth, at a meeting of the Tuscaloosa Rotary Club, by James F. Sulzby, Jr.

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The fifteenth annual meeting of the Southern Historical Association was held in Williamsburg, Virginia, November 10-12, 1949. A large delegation of Alabamians attended, including Dr. Frank L. Owsley, University of Alabama, who appeared on the program as chairman of the discussions on "Historical Literature on the Negro."

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Professor Carl Bode, of the University of Maryland, is writing a book to be entitled *The American Lyceum: Town Meeting of the Mind*. It

is a study of the cultural, historical, and literary aspects of the lecture system in our country from 1825 to 1860. He writes that he would be indebted to any readers who would let him know if a lyceum existed in their locality before 1860, and perhaps where he might write to secure records of such a lyceum.

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A recent issue of the University of Alabama Bulletin lists the students who received masters' degrees in August, 1949, including ten in history. The January issue of the University's Extension News Bulletin lists all publications of the faculty during the year 1948-49. Both bulletins are available on request.